LOKĀYATA

A Study In Ancient Indian Materialism

DEBIPRASAD CHATTOPADHYAYA

PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE

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DEBIPRASAD CHATTOPADHYAYA

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CHRONOLOGY

The dating of ancient Indian texts is largely conjectural. The following is intended chiefly to indicate the sequences rather than exact dates:

Indus Civilization	*c.* 3000 B.C. – foundation of the Indus cities.
Rig Veda	The earliest stratum presumably earlier than 1500 B.C., separated by many centuries from the latest stratum.
The *Brahmanas* and the *Upanisads*	Probably between 800 B.C. and 600 B.C.
Death of the Buddha	583 B.C.
The *Srauta Sutras* and the *Grihya Sutras*	Probably between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C.
Panini's Grammar	Probably earlier than 300 B.C.
Alexander's invasion	327 B.C.
The Maurya Dynasty	322-185 B.C. Kautilya's *Arthasastra* is also to be placed in this period.
Manu-Smriti	Probably between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200.
Brahma-Sutra	Probably between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200.
The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*	In its present form the *Mahabharata* could be placed in the 4th century A.D; the *Ramayana* in its 'final form' was at least one or two centuries earlier.
The Gupta Dynasty	A.D. 320-530. The *Puranas* were presumably recast into their present form during the same period.
Samkara	8th century A.D.
Sayana and Madhava	14th century A.D.

AID TO THE READER

It is regretted that diacritical marks could not be used in the text. There had, however, been occasions when the exact pronounciation of a Sanskrit word proved vital to the argument, e.g., it is argued that the word 'vrātya' was derived from the word 'vrāta' rather than 'vrata.' Where the difference between 'a' and 'ā' has really mattered, 'aa' is used to indicate the latter, e.g., in 'vraata' (vrāta), Kapilaa (Kapilā), 'bhaaga' (bhāga), 'varnakaa' (varnakā), etc. etc.

Italics are uniformly used to indicate Sanskrit and Pali words other than proper names.

Abbreviations used in the foot-notes are explained in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

'The interpretation of all ancient systems requires a constructive effort,' said Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya[1] in his Preface to the *Studies in Sankhya Philosophy*. Again, introducing his *Studies in Vedantism*, he said that they were 'not so much expositions of the traditional Vedanta as problematic constructions on Vedantic lines intended to bring out the relations of the system to modern philosophical systems.'[2] His method has accordingly been characterised as *constructive interpretation*, and this as contrasted with exposition in the ordinary sense: 'It is an extension or development in new directions of some fundamental tenets of the several schools. It is development not in the sense of necessary amplifications of what is potential therein: it is rather the discovery of new potentialities and is in that sense a genuine addition to the existing corpus of the philosophy of the relevant schools.'[3]

Obviously enough, it is not for everybody to follow such a method effectively. It demands a great deal of speculative brilliance and it perhaps also entails the risk of reading modern concepts where they do not actually exist. What interests us, however, is the admission by one of our eminent professors of philosophy that elements of such construction – though obviously not in the same spectacular sense – are really unavoidable for any study of the ancient philosophical system: 'It would be unfair to suggest that this is nothing but "subjectivism" in the sphere of interpretation. For the so-called "objective" interpretation is as much "subjective" in this sense as "constructive" interpretation. The mind that interprets is not a *tabula rasa;* neither is it just a calculating machine or an electronic brain. The interpreter is a thinking being and as such he will have to interpret with a mind having a system of beliefs and from a standpoint which he happens to occupy at the time of his interpretative activity. Subjectivism in this sense is inevitable in all

[1] SP 127.
[2] *Ib.* 1.
[3] *Ib.* pref. xi-xii.

human thinking. It is not any blemish either unless, indeed, the belief system is proved to be unfounded or the perspective distorted, or, again, unless its application turns out to be wrong or illegitimate.'[4]

What is clearly denied here is the broad possibility of studying the ancient philosophical systems without adopting a particular philosophical standpoint for the purpose. Subjectivism *in this sense* is perhaps inevitable. But subjectivism in the sense in which it manifests itself in the writings of an individual interpreter — or even in the sense in which it has so far manifested itself in the writings of the majority of the interpreters — cannot be so. For there are alternative standpoints in philosophy and the validity of none is determined by voting.

Of these alternative standpoints, moreover, there is one that can assure comparative objectivity, though it has not so far been seriously tried in interpreting the ancient Indian philosophical systems. Others — in other fields — have adopted it and have achieved magnificent results. I quote Professor George Thomson:[5]

> The use that men make of their leisure, their ideas of the physical world, of right and wrong, their art, philosophy and religion, vary and develop in accordance with variations and developments in their social relations which in turn are ultimately determined by their mode of securing their material subsistence. This is not to deny that there exists an objective reality, or that some men have formed a truer idea of it than others; but every idea of it is relative in so far as it starts from conscious or unconscious assumptions determined by the position of the man himself in the world he contemplates.
>
> To that extent, therefore, not only was the Greek view of life relative, but so is our view of the Greek view. Our view cannot be wholly objective, and the professed impartiality of some modern scholars is an illusion; but it will be more or less objective in proportion as we recognise and analyse our own preoccupations. We must become conscious of our prejudices in order to correct them. The historian of the past is a citizen of the present. Those who as citizens are averse or indifferent to contemporary social changes will seek in the civilization of ancient Greece something stable and absolutely valuable, which will both reflect and fortify their attitude of acquiescence. Others, who cannot acquiesce, will study the history of Greece as a process of continuous change, which, if it can be made to reveal its underlying laws, will help them to understand, and so direct, the forces making for change in the society of today.

We have here two points of vital significance. First, the view of the contemporary student of the ancient views — like the ancient views themselves — is ultimately conditioned by some

[4] *Ib.* pref. xii. [5] AA 2.

concrete material factors. Secondly, it also reacts back on the material conditions – tends either to fortify or change them. To reject either of the points is to precipitate into darkness and dogmatism. For, if the mind that interprets be not a *tabula rasa*, neither is the belief-system of the interpreter any kind of self-sufficient phantom chasing only phantoms. It is, on the contrary, 'directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.'[6] For after all, there remains

> the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat and drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; and that therefore the production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, the art and even the religious ideas of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of it these things must therefore be explained, instead of *vice versa*, as had hitherto been the case.[7]

All these imply the standpoint of materialism. It is from this that the present study is attempted. Since, on the admission of even those who would energetically dissociate themselves from materialism, some philosophical standpoint or other is really unavoidable for any student of the ancient philosophies, no apology is needed for consciously adopting one. However, the particular standpoint adopted here has imposed certain obligations on me about which I am anxious to be quite clear.

Far from this being the conventional standpoint, I am not aware of any systematic effort to study ancient Indian philosophy from the materialistic point of view. All the works on Indian philosophy are written explicitly – often implicitly – from the idealistic point of view. Under these circumstances, the proposed study from the materialistic point of view suffers from a two-fold limitation. It is somewhat tentative and it has to be highly argumentative.

My apology for the first limitation is simple and obvious. I have meant the present study to be only a draft for discussion and even the many mistakes that I must have committed would have their utility if they could provoke scholars with greater competence. Discussion and criticism – particularly from the materialistic point of view – is honestly the highest reward that I shall look forward to.

[6] Marx & Engels GI 13. [7] Marx & Engels SW i.12.

But the second limitation is in need of some explanation. Because of my obligations to this 'unconventional' point of view, I had frequently to question the validity of some long-cherished conclusions and propose a re-examination of certain standard interpretations of the ancient texts. Without this there was the risk of dogmatism and over-simplification. With this, however, the risk is no less serious. For the counter-assertions thus freely criticised are not infrequently associated with the names of some of the greatest scholars, without depending on whose contributions it would have been impossible for me — or, for that matter, for any student of Indian philosophy today — to study the subject at all. In short, I had to criticise those who are, to say the least, vastly my superiors.

A list of all their names would be a long one. But I am specially anxious to mention two of them, because I had the personal privilege of being a student of both. They are professors S. N. Dasgupta and S. Radhakrishnan. While begging to differ from the former, I could never for a moment forget that without his masterly guidance and the monumental work, *A History of Indian Philosophy,* I could never have learnt whatever little I know of Indian philosophy. Practically *all* the references in the Vedic, Buddhist and Jaina sources to the Lokayata were collected by him in one place, a feat which a scholar of his calibre alone could have performed. Students like us are thus left practically with no problem of discovering any new fact about the Lokayata; the only task that remains is that of seeking new relations of these facts. And that is what I have attempted. Again, if I found occasion to refer to Professor Radhakrishnan, mainly for the purpose of differing from him, the reason is that his highly consistent interpretation of the entire Indian philosophical heritage from the uncompromisingly idealistic point of view enjoys the widest popularity both in and outside the academic circles.

I have always been conscious that this tendency to criticise the elders was likely to encourage audacity and arrogance. The safeguard I could devise was to make the elders speak for themselves and, as far as possible, against each other. Fortunately, I was able to follow this procedure to a considerable extent. For, evidently because of the pressure of the objective data, some of the idealist interpreters themselves had occasionally to transgress their own idealistic preoccupations. They have thus, though in different contexts, thrown some significant suggestions

which, if pieced together, could help the reconstruction of a picture I was myself trying to arrive at. This eagerness to quote what others have already said, along with the anxiety to document my argument as far as possible, I am aware, have made my presentation rather wearisome and unattractive.

Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, I found the materialistic point of view particularly relevant for a study of what is referred to as the Lokayata in our ancient texts. Apart from the general considerations concerning the possibility of the materialistic point of view, there is a special circumstance that makes it so.

It has not been my purpose to attempt an exhaustive study of all the materialistic trends in ancient Indian philosophy; I wanted rather to concentrate on that which was specifically called the Lokayata in the ancient texts. Thus, for example, the atomism of the Vaisesikas and the Sarvastivadi Buddhists contains important elements of Indian materialism. But it falls outside the scope of the present study. However, as it is well known, there is a special reason that makes the study of the Lokayata particularly difficult. While at least the major texts of the other schools are preserved for us, *all* the original works of the Lokayatikas are lost beyond the prospect of any possible recovery. What we are actually left with are merely a few fragmentary survivals of the Lokayata, but *all these as preserved in the writings of its opponents*, i.e., of those who wanted only to refute and ridicule it. Lokayata thus remains to be reconstructed from the essentially hostile references to it.

Under these circumstances, if the modern student is himself deeply out of sympathy with materialism as such, he may not always remain alert to distinguish between the vilification of and genuine information about the Lokayata. This has, as a matter of fact, happened with the majority of our modern scholars who wanted to look upon the Lokayata through the deep-rooted idealistic convictions of their own. Therefore, the study of the Lokayata *from the materialistic point of view* acquires a special significance. It means a reassessment and a rediscovery, a break-away from the beaten track.

However, it is necessary to be clear about the materialistic point of view itself. As is well known, the most advanced form of the materialistic point of view was worked out by Marx and Engels and is broadly referred to as Marxism. I have accordingly attempted to approach the Lokayata from the Marxist

point of view. But that means a much greater undertaking than a mere reconstruction of its lost structure. Marxism looks for the material roots of each phenomenon and views them in their historical connections and movement. It ascertains the laws of such movement and demonstrates their development from root to flower, and in so doing lifts every phenomenon out of a merely emotional, irrational, mystic fog and brings it to the bright light of understanding.

Accordingly, as a Marxist student of the Lokayata I had also to survey the material conditions of ancient India of which it was the product. As a result, there had inevitably been long digressions from the central argument. It might be useful to sum up my main argument here and sketch the plan followed.

Despite ramifications, the argument is a continuous one. It is unfolded in four stages corresponding to the four main divisions of the study.

Chapters I & II of Book I are designed to discuss the Problem and the Method respectively. The problem of the Lokayata is, again, discussed in two stages. In the first stage, I have surveyed the mass of the modern theories about the Lokayata. Though highly heterogeneous and mutually contradictory, practically all these take their start from a doubtful representation of the Lokayata which we come across in a medieval compendium of Indian philosophy, the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*, written by a leading representative of the most outstanding form of Indian idealism. Discarding its authenticity on evidences both internal and external, I have, in the second stage, moved on to consider the other available clues.

Judging from the fact that even the earliest Buddhist sources repeatedly mentioned the Lokayata and, further, as already argued by Dasgupta and others, even the older *Upanisads* mentioned it, — though under the name of the Asura-view, — it is natural to presume that the Lokayata, in its original form, must have been very ancient: it was certainly pre-Buddhistic and even pre-Upanisadic, though how very ancient it is impossible to be precise about. In such an early period of Indian history we do not expect the development of a materialistic philosophy in the modern sense and indeed the Lokayata was originally not so. This may mean some disappointment for an over-enthusiastic modern materialist; from the materialistic point of view, however, such a disappointment is necessary. The materialistic philosophy in the modern sense presupposes the

development of certain material conditions which could not have existed in India before the *Upanisads*. What then was the original Lokayata? That is, what was it which we find referred to as the Lokayata in the ancient texts? Etymologically it means 'that which is prevalent among the people' and also 'that which is essentially this-worldly.' But the earliest of the available clues are hopelessly fragmentary and are too often embedded in mythological imagination. Nevertheless, a careful examination of some of these may give us a dim view of a primordial complex of a this-worldly outlook related to a body of ritual practices and the whole theme being somehow or other 'prevalent' among the masses. The most conspicuous feature of this primitive world-outlook appears to be *deha-vada,* the view that the material human body (*deha*) is the microcosm of the universe, along with a cosmogony attributing the origin of the universe to the 'union of the male and the female.'

It is impossible to be certain whether this world-outlook, in its origin, was at all theoretically formulated. The presumption is that it was not. Yet the significant point is that though far from the materialism of our times, this archaic world-outlook did represent a stage of consciousness yet to witness the birth of the spiritualistic concepts like God, Soul and the Other-World. In this sense of being essentially pre-spiritualistic, it may possibly be characterised as primitive proto-materialism, though it was far from acquiring the form of a philosophical outlook proper.

This, I have argued, was the humble beginning of the Lokayata. But it had farreaching philosophical successes to achieve. For it eventually became a highly developed philosophical system and represented the strongest opposition to the earliest form of Indian idealism, namely the Vedanta. But I had to postpone this discussion to Chapter VI of Book III dealing with the Sankhya system, because I felt that in the meanwhile certain other points had to be clarified.

The first problem is suggested by the body of ritual practices which, on various evidences, were related to the Lokayata as mentioned in the ancient texts. There are, moreover, certain suggestions that the rituals were obscure and obscene, indicating, as is only to be expected, a primitive stage of development. But the literary sources, by themselves, do not help us to understand them fully. I had, accordingly, to search for some method with the help of which it could be possible not only to reconstruct a fuller picture of the primitive rituals as related to the primitive

proto-materialism, but also to understand the entire primitive complex as directly interwoven with the productive activity of men living evidently at a primitive level of development. Such a method was suggested to me by the recent writings of Professor George Thomson, whose application of the fundamental principles of Marxism in the interpretation of the ancient Greek literature and philosophy appears to me to have many a lesson for the student of ancient Indian philosophy. I have, accordingly, in Chapter II, attempted to illustrate this method with some concrete literary-speculative material of ancient India. The material I have chosen, however, is from the Vedic literature, which is really opposed to the Lokayata tradition. This is meant to serve another aspect of my argument. I have argued that in spite of all the idealistic grandeur with which the Vedic world-outlook was eventually characterised, its subsoil, too, was formed by some kind of primitive proto-materialism, which for all its differences from the original Lokayata, resembled it in representing a stage of pre-spiritualistic consciousness. This is a point which had repeatedly occurred in the course of my study, though I could return to a full discussion of its implications only in Chapter VIII of Book IV, dealing with the emergence of the idealistic outlook in the Vedic tradition.

After discussing the method in Chapter II of Book I, I could have resumed the argument concerning the original Lokayata from where it was left in Chapter I, but for the fact that the discussion of the method ushered in certain questions concerning the social background, without answering which, the Lokayata could not be placed in its proper perspective. However, the discussion of the social background had to be introduced with reference to the specific problem of the Lokayata. The primordial complex of the primitive proto-materialism as related to the obscure rituals, — which in the first chapter I have presumed to be the original essence of the Lokayata and which in the second chapter I found to be indicative of a primitive society, — had acquired a more popular name in later times, viz. Tantrism, however much it may contradict the popular notions about Tantrism itself. Now a peculiar feature of the Indian cultural history is that Tantrism in this sense is not only ancient but also medieval and even modern. Its relics are traced as far back as the Indus period and, as repeatedly claimed, its influence has continued unbroken till today. This peculiar tenacity of the archaic beliefs and practices throughout the cultural history

of India can only be accounted for by the actual survival in the social reality of those material conditions of which these were the products. But what could be these material conditions? Chapters III and IV of Book II are designed to answer this question.

In Chapter III, I have argued that two of the most conspicuous features of the Indian social history had been uneven development and tribal survival. The primitive society has always persisted here along with and by the side of the advanced and civilised society, as it is in fact persisting even today. Secondly, relics of such primitive or tribal society have always strongly characterised the social fabric of India — ancient, modern and medieval. It is, as I have called it, a case of incomplete de-tribalisation, a point which I have attempted to illustrate with the following: the ethnic composition, the village communities, the caste organisation and the customary laws. Of course this, of all my chapters, is the most tentative and inadequate. The problem of Indian social history is vast and enormously complicated, and rather than aiming at a full reconstruction of it I found the scope in this chapter of emphasising only those aspects of it that are not ordinarily emphasised, though they have direct bearings on our understanding of the survivals of the primitive elements in Indian culture. I feel that the details devoted to some of the problems are disproportionate while the treatment of some others — particularly the problem of the traditional land-tenure and that of the transition from the tribe to the state — has been rather desultory. But with all these inadequacies, the main points that I have argued may be substantially valid. I hope to see these better substantiated and more ably worked out by more competent Marxists.

Chapter IV is designed to discuss one specific feature of this tribal survival, viz. mother-right. I have treated this separately because of its obvious importance to my argument: it gives the only possible background for understanding the sources of Tantrism. One of the most conspicuous features of Tantrism happens to be its supreme emphasis on the Female Principle, called the *sakti* or the *prakriti*. As such, it reflected the social conditions under which women held a more important place in society than men. Apart from the writings of Professor George Thomson — upon which incidentally I have depended throughout my study — I am particularly indebted to *The Mothers* by R. Briffault as the main source-book for mother-right and the

ancient rituals related to it. Following Thomson and Briffault I have argued that, because agriculture was the discovery of women, the initial stage of the agricultural economy created the material conditions for the social superiority of the female. Following Ehrenfels and others I have argued further that mother-right in India could have been historically connected with the early agricultural economy and that it was, in all probability, violently suppressed in the subsequent days. Yet the peculiar tenacity with which the elements of mother-right have survived in the lives of the Indian people is quite striking. Could the reason be that the vast majority of them remained the tillers of the soil? In any case, this connection of Tantrism with the early agricultural economy gave me the most important clue to its other features. By contrast, the economic life of the early Vedic people was predominantly pastoral. That accounts for their highly patriarchal society along with a characteristically male-dominated world-outlook. It is here, again, that we have the real clue to the basic difference between the two main currents of the subsequent philosophical thought in India — the Vedic and the non-Vedic, Tantrism in a broad sense being the dominating element of the latter.

These preliminaries over, I could, in Chapters V & VI of Book III return to the main argument about the Lokayata. In these two chapters I have attempted to answer two main questions. First, what could be the ultimate material basis of the primitive *deha-vada* and the primitive rituals related to it and how, at the stage at which these were originally evolved, could these be connected with the mode of securing the material means of subsistence? Secondly, what was the course of development this archaic outlook eventually underwent? In Chapter V, designed to answer the first question, I have traced the origin of Tantrism to the fertility magic of the early agriculturists and in Chapter VI, designed to answer the second question, I have argued that the Sankhya philosophy was originally a development of the primitive proto-materialism which formed the substratum of Tantrism itself. In arguing both the points, I had to go against many an accepted notion concerning ancient Indian philosophy. But I shall mention here specially one which appears to me to be crucial.

How could Tantrism, with all its limitations as evidenced by its relations to the primitive rituals, have this substratum of primitive proto-materialism at all? Agricultural ritual, in which

it has its ultimate source, rests on the assumption that the productivity of nature — of mother earth — can be enhanced or induced by the imitation of human reproduction and conversely, human fertility is similarly related to natural fertility.[8] In the primitive stage these principles were not, of course, consciously formulated. But if we look back and are at all justified in theoretically formulating the fundamentals of this primitive view, we may look at it as an instinctive groping at a theory according to which the human body and the earth are assumed to have the same nature, the two being taken as interacting and inter-dependent. The corollaries are two-fold. First, it should be possible to understand the mystery of nature if we can understand the mystery of the human body — the *deha* or the material human body is the microcosm of the universe. Secondly, the birth of the universe is the result of the same or a similar process as the birth of the human beings. The *deha-vada* and the cosmogony of Tantrism are but elaborations of these two corollaries.

It is not difficult to see that in such a scheme of thought there is no place whatsoever for anything that may attribute primacy to the spirit. In fact the earlier receptacles for the notion of the primacy of the spirit — the conceptions of God, Soul and the Other-World — are conspicuously absent from all these. Thus, with all the ignorance about nature as well as the human body, human consciousness at this stage remains yet to be emancipated from the world and proceed to the formation of the spiritualistic or idealistic world-outlook. This is not materialism in the mature sense; nevertheless, in the sense of an instinctive acceptance of the primacy of the material human body and the material earth on which it lives, it can be characterised as some form of primitive proto-materialism.

I confess, when I first arrived at these formulations, I had myself many a hesitation about their plausibility. But in 1956, I came across the second volume of *Science and Civilization in China* by Professor Joseph Needham. It helped me immensely to clarify my own ideas and reinforce my own argument. What has become clear by his masterly analysis of Chinese Taoism has indeed a flood of light to throw on what still remains largely obscure about Indian Tantrism. Needham himself has drawn our attention to the close similarity — and even the possible interchange of ideas — between Taoism and Tantrism and he

[8] See Thomson SAGS i. 204 ff. for the materialistic interpretation of the primitive fertility magic.

has argued that the Taoist speculations about and insight into nature 'lie at the basis of Chinese science.' Of course, Chinese Taoism, like Indian Tantrism, was basically magic. But, argued Needham, 'science and magic are in their earliest stages indistinguishable' and this is a point the importance of which 'we cannot emphasise too much.' What accounts for such an indistinguishable relation between the two? It was manual labour, answered Needham: 'magic and science were originally united in a single undifferentiated complex of manual operations.'[9]

Bold formulations like these, coming as they do from a scientist of Needham's stature, helped me clearly to see how Indian Tantrism, because of its rootedness in the manual operations of agriculture, and in spite of being magic, did also contain the potentialities of later Indian science — particularly the sciences of physiology and alchemy.

But let us concentrate on the primitive proto-materialism. Science, it is argued, is instinctively materialistic. The assumption of the primacy of spirit gives theology and metaphysics, but not science. From this point of view, Indian Tantrism could be proto-science because of its proto-materialism; even the authors of the so-called alchemical *Tantras* were not entirely unaware of this (pp. 356-7, Chapter V). At the source of Tantrism, again, was agricultural magic, considered at a particularly undeveloped stage as an aid to the manual operation of agriculture itself. It is in this sense that the primitive proto-materialism of Tantrism, too, was ultimately rooted in manual labour.

All these lead us to see that so long as human consciousness retains its moorings in manual labour, it remains instinctively materialistic. For there is a sense of objective coercion about the labour process itself, a point that I have argued elaborately elsewhere.[10] This is negatively substantiated by the fact that the emergence of the idealistic outlook in the human consciousness presupposes a separation of thought from action — of mental labour from manual labour — along with a sense of degradation socially attached to the latter. The result is an exaltation of the spirit or consciousness — of pure thought or pure reason — to the status of a delusional omnipotence having, as it were, the power

[9] I could do no more than quote a few stray lines from Needham's work. For a proper understanding of his view concerning the sources of science, it is necessary at least to go through SCC ii. 83-139.

[10] See Appendix.

to dictate terms to reality. And this is the essense of the idealistic outlook.

Considering the importance of this process for the purpose of understanding, though negatively, the nature of the primitive pre-spiritualistic world-outlook, I have designed a special chapter (Chapter VIII, Book IV) to a detailed discussion of it. Since historically the idealistic outlook first emerged in Indian philosophy in the later portions of the Vedic literatures, this chapter has turned out to be a review of these. Obviously enough, it was not necessary for me to go into the intricacies of this idealistic outlook itself; it was enough to show that this idealistic outlook did emerge on the ruins of a primitive proto-materialism, representing the consciousness of the primitive pre-class society in which manual labour and mental labour were not dissociated from each other. But it was necessary to go into the details of the further development of the primitive proto-materialism of the Lokayata tradition. This has been done in Chapter VI of Book III, dealing with the original Sankhya.

All these, really speaking, did complete my main argument. But there is another circumstance that I could not just overlook. Certain philosophers of the Buddha's times are generally treated as the followers of the Lokayata views. Accordingly, I felt the need to discuss them in a separate chapter – Chapter VII of Book III. However, my study of these philosophers led me to the view that they had little or no affiliation to the genuinely Lokayata tradition – i.e., to what is specifically referred to as the Lokayata in the ancient texts, in spite of the occasional hangover of a kind of primitive and muddled materialism in their views. As a matter of fact, the Buddhist and the Jaina texts, which happen to be the main sources of our knowledge of their views, never mentioned them as the followers of the Lokayata, though the name Lokayata repeatedly occurred in these. Nevertheless, I found my study of them amply rewarded by a peculiar fascination of its own.

There remains only one other question that I would like to answer in this Introduction. Looking back at the argument in its entirety what value, from the Marxist point of view, do I propose to attach to it? Of course, the significance of the Sankhya in the Indian philosophical heritage is discussed in its proper place. But what is the significance of the recognition of the primitive proto-materialism, which forms the substratum of both the Lokayata and the Vedic traditions? My answer is

simple enough. Its value is comparable to the recognition of primitive communism in Marxism. The Marxists emphasise the importance of primitive communism not because they dream of a return to it. The purpose is rather to show that private property and the state machinery are not eternal adjuncts to human existence: 'They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage.'[11] Similarly, the primitive proto-materialism is discussed not for the purpose of a glorification of it and surely there is not even the remotest apology for any return to it. Yet it has its value by way of showing that the spiritualistic outlook is not innate in man. It, too, will be finally washed away as inevitably as it arose at an earlier stage: if the spiritualistic outlook came into being, it will also, along with the social separation between manual and mental labour, pass away. This has some particular relevance for the understanding of the Indian philosophical tradition. For we are never tired of listening that spiritualism is an inherent feature of Indian thought. But, 'Ah! Faustus, now hast thou but one bare hour to live!'

[11] Engels OF 284.

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Chapter One

ASURA - VIEW

THE PROBLEM OF ANCIENT INDIAN MATERIALISM

There is an interesting ambiguity in the philosophical terminology current in ancient India; its significance is, moreover, peculiarly modern.

Our ancients did not feel the necessity of using two separate words to refer to the philosophy of the people and the materialistic philosophy. There was only one word that meant both. This was Lokayata, alternatively called Carvaka or Barhaspatya philosophy. Lokayata meant the philosophy of the people. Lokayata also meant the philosophy of this-worldliness or materialism.

1. Materialism and Philosophy of the People

Lokesu ayatah lokayata. It was called Lokayata because it was prevalent (*ayatah*) among the people (*lokesu*). E. B. Cowell,[1] in his translation of the medieval compendium of Indian philosophy called the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha* (by Madhavacarya, 14th century A.D.) has accepted this etymology of the name. H. P. Sastri,[2] too, used the word to mean the world-outlook of the people. He has done it in a simple and matter-of-fact manner, as if it were a part of the philosophical common sense of the country and as such any evidence in its support was hardly necessary.

But such evidences are there and we shall mention one or two. S. N. Dasgupta[3] has already pointed out that the Buddhist text *Divyavadana* used the name Lokayata in this etymological

[1] *SDS* (Cowell) 2n. [2] *BD* (B) 37-8. [3] HIP iii. 514n.

sense, that is, to mean what was prevalent among the people. Gunaratna,[4] the Jaina commentator of the 14th century A.D., in his commentary on the *Sat Darsana Samuccaya* (by Haribhadra, 8th century A.D.) referred to the Lokayatas (or the Lokayatikas) as those who behaved like the unthinking mob, the common undiscerning people. Madhavacarya,[5] too, gave practically the same reason to explain why the ancient materialistic view, traditionally associated with the name of Carvaka, was also called the Lokayata view:

> The mass of men in accordance with the *sastras* of policy and enjoyment, considering wealth and desire the only ends of man, and denying the existence of any object belonging to a future world, are found to follow only the doctrine of Carvaka. Hence another name for that school is Lokayata,—a name well accordant with the thing signified.

And in saying this, Madhava was only following in the footsteps of his great master, Samkaracarya[6] (8th century A.D.), who in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, equated the crude mob (*prakrita janah*) with the followers of the Lokayata-views (*lokayatikah*) by mentioning the two together, almost in the same breath.

It is true that a contempt for the Lokayata was largely responsible for such statements. Nevertheless, this does not minimise the importance of the statements, particularly in view of the fact that it is implied by the very etymology of the word. Lokayata did mean the philosophy of the people, though those who were using the name in this sense had often a deep contempt for the people along with their philosophy.

And this philosophy was essentially this-wordly or materialistic. Other evidences apart, this is indicated by the alternative significance of the name. The *Petersburg Dictionary*[7] rendered *lokayata* simply as materialism. According to M. Monier-Williams,[8] the name, in the masculine, meant 'a materialist,' and, in the neuter 'materialism, the system of atheistic philosophy.' H. T. Colebrooke[9] showed that the word *lokayatana*, in masculine, meant only a materialist.

Some of our eminent traditional scholars, too, have given this interpretation of the name. According to Pancanan Tarka-

[4] *TRD* 300. [5] *SDS* (Cowell) 2. [6] On *Br Su* i. 1.1.

[7] V. 235. The PTS Dictionary, however, takes the word to mean the world-outlook of the people.

[8] SED 907. [9] *Ib.*

ratna,[10] this philosophy was called Lokayata because it believed in nothing but this concrete material world (*loka*) and denied everything beyond. Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyaya[11] argued on similar lines. The name Lokayata, according to him, was to be derived from the essential emphasis on the natural world (*loka* or *iha-loka*) in this philosophy.

We come across in the older texts certain attempts to explain the name from the point of view of its materialistic content. Buddhaghosa,[12] the Buddhist commentator of the 5th century A.D., is said to have suggested that the word *ayatah* could also be used in the sense of *ayatana*, meaning 'the basis'; in accordance with this Lokayata would mean the philosophy, the basis of which is the material world (*loka*). A somewhat similar derivation of the name was suggested by Haribhadra[13] and his commentators. He defined *loka* as all that could be the object of sense-perception. Manibhadra,[14] a commentator, tried to be more explicit. He summed up by saying that *loka* meant *padartha-sartha* or *padartha-samuha*, that is, the totality of the material existences. According to both, since the name Lokayata was rooted in this word *loka*, it could only mean the materialistic philosophy.

Thus Lokayata meant not only the philosophy of the people but also the philosophy of this-worldliness or materialism. As a matter of fact both S. Radhakrishnan and Dasgupta, the two outstanding historians of Indian philosophy, have alternatively drawn our attention to the two meanings of the same name. 'Lokayata,' Radhakrishnan[15] has said, 'directed to the world of sense, is the Sanskrit word for materialism.' Dasgupta[16] has observed, 'Lokayata (lit., that which is found among people) seems to have been the name by which all Carvaka doctrines were generally known.' It remains for us only to connect the two meanings, and if we do it, we shall be led to doubt the reiterated claim that the philosophical tradition of India was one of unbroken idealism or spiritualism. The claim is made even in our own days:

> The characteristic of Indian thought is that it has paid greater attention to the inner world of man than to the outer world.[17]

[10] Presidential Address at the Philosophical Section of the Bengali Literary Conference, 14th Session.
[11] *VD* (B) *Sravana* (1281).
[12] See Dasgupta HIP iii. 515.
[13] *SatDS* 81.
[14] Manibhadra on above.
[15] IP i. 279n.
[16] HIP i. 78n.
[17] Radhakrishnan (ed.) HPEW i. 21.

This is true only if we overlook that trend of philosophical thought which our tradition had wanted to attribute to the Indian masses. Their world outlook was instinctively materialistic. The name Lokayata is an evidence of this fact.

2. Problem of Indian Materialism

It follows, therefore, that ancient Indian materialism cannot be looked at as a philosophical thought, enjoying as it were, an existence-in-itself in the ideological sphere. The question of our ancient materialism is inextricably mixed up with the history of our people. What was meant by 'the people'? Did they have a philosophy? If so, in what sense was this a materialistic one? These are questions we cannot avoid in studying the Lokayata.

Obviously, the answers to these questions are to be sought in the data concerning the Lokayata that are preserved for us. But these data themselves, far from being helpful and satisfactory, introduce us to various and often unexpected difficulties.

It is well known, for example, that the available materials concerning the Lokayata are so few and fragmentary that they almost call for a Cuvier to reconstruct its lost structure. However, as we progress we begin to realise that this by no means is the only or even the real difficulty. Such data are, moreover, often highly obscure and, at least apparently, heterogeneous and ambiguous.

This explains, though partially, why the modern investigators were led to so many erratic conclusions concerning the origin and significance of the Lokayata in ancient India. As we shall presently see, each one of them relied rather exclusively on a selected datum and, according to the individual peculiarity of this, arrived at an individualistic understanding of the Lokayata.

There has, however, been another factor that contributed to the multiplicity of modern views on ancient Indian materialism. With all the differences among themselves, they have, directly or indirectly, considered Madhava's *Sarva Darsana Samgraha* to be the only reliable starting point for purposes of reconstructing the lost Lokayata. But Madhava's version of the Lokayata is at best a doubtful one; we shall presently see why it is so. It may be that once we can emancipate ourselves from his influence, the informations about the Loka-

yata which we come across in sources considerably older than Madhava would not appear to us to be so baffling after all.

Thus it was that I thought of avoiding the beaten track and searched for some method that could throw new light on the ancient data and help us to understand the Lokayata as the world outlook of the people. Such a method was suggested to me by the recent writings of G. Thomson, particularly his *Aeschylus and Athens* and in the first two volumes of *Studies in Ancient Greek Society*. In Chapter 2 I have argued how certain obscure and even apparently meaningless fragments of our ancient philosophical literatures may possibly be clearly understood if interpreted according to the principles followed by Thomson.

In trying to follow his procedure, however, I was obliged to raise certain questions that are not usually raised in the standard discussions on the subject. The results have been more than mere digressions. I had even to modify my original plan substantially and the undertaking, to a large extent, turned out to be an enquiry into the sources of those obscure cults that are broadly referred to as Tantrism. Further, the much-debated question concerning the origin and development of the Sankhya philosophy had to be seriously faced and at least partially answered. And I found it impossible to do all these without entering into the more complicated question concerning mother-right in India. I had, in fact, to end by realising that, our knowledge of the Lokayata is still so incomplete, largely because of an unfortunate situation. Mother-right in ancient India, along with its characteristic ideology, remains yet to be seriously investigated into. As we shall see, J. Marshall, following the suggestions of R. P. Chanda, made a number of valuable observations in this connection. And O. R. Ehrenfels, inspired by Marshall, has collected further materials about it. But owing largely to their neglect of Morgan, Engels and Briffault, the conclusions they arrived at remain insufficiently important.

More startling, however, than all these is another point that struck me in course of my own studies. It is the basic similarity between the Lokayata tradition and the more archaic stratum of the Vedic tradition. This is most remarkable. The two traditions, as we know them, are widely different; in fact, diametrically opposed. The contempt for the Lokayata of those who eventually announced themselves to be the inheritors of the Vedic tradition is indeed well known. No less known is the contempt

of the Lokayatikas for them. Nevertheless, the similarities referred to are remarkable. This demands some explanation. I had to digress long to enquire into the origin of the ideas and beliefs of the early Vedic peoples, and this, paradoxically enough, in order to understand the Lokayata more fully.

All this is unconventional. I shall, therefore, try to explain the circumstances under which I was obliged to raise these questions.

3. Lost Lokayata Texts

It is customary to begin the enquiry into ancient Indian materialism with the assumption that the real difficulty in reconstructing its history is the scarcity of relevant materials. For it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that in the ocean of uncertainty concerning the lost Lokayata the only piece of definite information is that we are left with no original work on it. Modern scholars do not agree among themselves even on the question whether any such work ever existed at all.

Rhys Davids[18] strongly denied the possibility. Referring to the refutation of the Lokayata by Samkara and the Buddhists, he observed that

> the expressions used point rather to an opinion held by certain thinkers, in union with other opinions, and not expounded in any special treatise.

Any text setting forth a philosophy thus refuted was for him but an unwarranted assumption.

However, the evidences collected by Tucci, Garbe and Dasgupta are decisively against such a view. Tucci[19] observed:

> It is well known that no Lokayata text has come down to us.... But from this to assume, as some scholars did, that Lokayata texts never existed, means to go too far.... I only shall briefly expose some of the facts which, as it seems to me, clearly point out that Lokayata texts were known in ancient times.

A Lokayata *sastra* was quoted in Candrakirti's *Prajna Sastra*. Aryadeva's *Satasastra* contained an actual quotation from *Brihaspati Sutra* and 'tradition attributes to Brihaspati himself the first treatise of the system called after him, Barhaspatya, and we do not know why we should not accept it.'[20] According to the unknown author of the marginal notes to the work of Puppha-

[18] DB i. 166 ff. [19] PIPC 1925 36. [20] *Ib.*

danta, 'the Purandara named in the text was a *Carvaka-mate-granthakarta*,' i.e., an author of texts expounding the Carvaka doctrine.

Garbe[21] mentioned two authorities, namely Patanjali[22] and Bhaskaracarya[23] who 'bear witness to the former existence of textbooks of materialism.'

Dasgupta[24] referred to the Buddhist text *Divyavadana* where the Lokayata was 'regarded as a special branch of study which had a *bhasya* and a *pravacana* (i.e., a commentary and annotations on it).' To this he added the evidence of Patanjali, already mentioned by Garbe, and considered this evidence to be decisive. The grammarian Katyayana (*c.* 300 B.C.) formulated a rule whereby

> the word *varnaka* becomes *varnakaa* in the feminine to mean a blanket or a wrapper, and Patanjali (about 150 B.C.) in interpreting this *Varttika Sutra*, says that the object of restricting the formation of the word *varnaka* only to the sense of a cotton or woollen wrapper is that in other senses the feminine form would be *varnikaa* or *varttika* (meaning a commentary) as in the case of the Bhaguri commentary on the Lokayata.[25]

From this Dasgupta concluded that 'it seems to be quite certain that there was a book called the *Lokayata* on which there was at least one commentary earlier than 150 B.C., or even earlier than 300 B.C., the probable date of Katyayana, the author of the *Varttika Sutra*.'[26]

But such texts, even if these were once in existence, are lost to us. Judging from the bitter hostility expressed in so many places against the Lokayata-views, it is often conjectured that these might have been deliberately destroyed.[27] Whatever it was, it must have happened long ago, presumably before the beginning of the Christian era. Apart from the mere mention of such lost treatises, what we now concretely possess are a few stray references to the Lokayata-views, or to its followers called the Lokayatikas, as preserved in the writings of those who wanted only to ridicule and refute the Lokayata. As S.K. Belvalkar and R.D. Ranade [28] have put it, this philosophy had the misfortune of being known to us only through the writings of its opponents.

The opponents of the Lokayatikas could not have had any special anxiety to describe dispassionately what Lokayata

[21] ERE viii. 138. [22] *Mahabhasya* vii. 3. 45.
[23] On *Br Su* iii. 3.53. [24] HIP iii. 514. [25] *Ib.* iii. 515-6.
[26] *Ib.* [27] Nehru DI 100. [28] HIP ii. 459.

actually stood for. We do not, therefore, expect an unbiased version of its views in these sources. Secondly, writers belonging to different schools of philosophy tried to refute the Lokayata in different contexts of philosophical controversies. So the informations obtained about the Lokayata from these sources are necessarily fragmentary. The only notable exception is probably the version of the Lokayata in the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha,* where the author gives us the impressiin of coherence. But we shall presently see how little we can rely on it.

Under these circumstances, Rhys Davids[29] was fully justified in claiming that 'pending the discovery of other texts, and specially of such as are not only the testimony of opponents,' what we can at best hope is to arrive at a *working hypothesis* concerning the Lokayata to explain its fragmentary survivals.

Rhys Davids wrote this in 1899. On the basis of our experience since then we can now definitely add that there is no hope of such a discovery. It is true that F. W. Thomas recovered a certain *Brihaspati Sutra* which, as edited and translated by him, was published in 1921. It could be a Lokayata work because Brihaspati is said to have been the founder of the school. However, no scholar could take this text seriously. It was a very late product often dominated by an ideology really alien, or even positively hostile, to the Lokayata-views. As Tucci[30] remarked, 'it bears a clear Brahmanical character.' At the same time, he hastened to add:

> But in spite of that you will find some quotations in it on the Lokayata, which are likely to have been taken from an ancient but now lost compilation having a peculiar Lokayata character.

That, however, is the real problem. What exactly is meant by *the peculiar Lokayata character?* And what is the source of our information about it?

4. Traditional Method

In answer to this it is suggested, though often tacitly—and Rhys Davids was one who definitely rejected the suggestion—that the most notable of the Lokayata-fragments being those that are preserved in Madhava's work, this should be the starting point of our study. As Garbe[31] said, 'the principal source of our

[29] DB i. 170-1. [30] PIPC 1925. 36. [31] ERE viii. 138.

knowledge, however, is the first chapter of the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*.'

This being fairly typical of the attitude of the modern scholars, the method usually followed by them for reconstructing the Lokayata was to begin by gathering the basic idea about it from Madhava's work and then to interpret in its light other relics of the Lokayata obtained from other sources. Even Sastri, the importance of whose contributions to our knowledge of the Lokayata we shall presently return to discuss, was not free from a bias for this method. Of course Rhys Davids doubted the authenticity of Madhava. Paradoxically enough, his strong doubt of Madhava, as we shall see, was really based on a rather exclusive reliance on him.

It needs to be pointed out here that there are at least two distinct advantages in the traditional method which tempt us to follow it.

First, Madhava's account of the Lokayata is clear and coherent. The epistemology, metaphysics and ethics of the Lokayatikas, as Madhava wanted us to understand these, are presented by him in a neatly woven logical construction.

According to him, the Lokayatikas denied the validity of any source of knowledge other than immediate sense-perception. And therefore they denied all realities except the gross objects of the senses. There was no God, no soul and no survival after death. It naturally followed that the Lokayatikas denied all religious and moral values and cared only for the pleasures of the senses. This is, in essence, the Lokayata-view as represented by Madhava. Whether drawn from his own imagination or not, such a representation is free from any obscurity and is wonderful in its internal coherence. If we make this our starting point, we have at least the feeling of moving on secure grounds.

The second advantage, and by no means an unimportant one, of starting from Madhava is that it also promotes a sense of familiarity in the minds of our modern scholars. For it agrees smoothly with the contemporary notions of, or more properly, the contemporary prejudices against the materialistic philosophy in general. Materialism, as Madhava put it, had been the cult of those crude people who little understood the higher values of human existence. This is also the attitude of the modern scholars. They are out of sympathy with the materialistic philosophy as deeply as Madhava was.

Here are two examples:

L. de la Vallee Poussin,[32] discussing the Lokayata standpoint said, 'A man who wanted to convert—let us say "pervert" —a woman to his materialist opinions,' etc., etc. Materialism, to the writer, is but mere perversion. This is so obvious to him that he was making a statement of fact, as it were.

Practically the same attitude to materialism explains how Radhakrishnan[33] could say that the 'substance of this doctrine is summed up by a character in the allegorical play of *Prabodhacandrodaya.*' The author certainly knows that this is as good as saying that the substance of the Socratic view or the essence of the Socratic character is to be found in the plays of Aristophanes. For what we really have in the *Prabodhacandrodaya* is only a caricature of the Materialist, and by no way a subtle one.[34] This play, it is well known, 'was written by Krisna Misra of Mithila to expose, ridicule and contradict the ideas of the Buddhists, Jainas, Carvakas, Kapalikas and other sects which had taken hold of the public mind in his days.'[35] No scholar would suggest the possibility of recovering the substance of Buddhism or Jainism from it. With the materialistic philosophy, however, the matter is different. The modern scholars are not interested in distinguishing between its *substance* and its *caricature*. And so they find Madhava's account of the Lokayata so satisfactory to start with.

Notwithstanding these two apparent advantages, however, we are obliged to doubt the traditional procedure. To begin with, the contradictory character of the conclusions that result-

[32] ERE viii. 494. [33] IP i. 278.

[34] Here are some specimens (*Act* ii. (Taylor).

MATERIALIST: (looks at the great king Passion and advances towards him) May thou be victorious—Materialist salutes thee.

PASSION: My friend, you are welcome, sit down here.

MATERIALIST: (sitting down) Vice prostrates himself at your feet.

PASSION: The felicity of Vice, I hope, is unimpaired.

MATERIALIST: By your bounty all are happy. Having accomplished what he was ordered to perform, he now desires to touch your feet; for blessed is he, who after destroying the enemies of his lord, beholds his gracious face with exceeding joy, and prostrates himself at his lotus feet.

PASSION: What exploits have been performed by Vice?

MATERIALIST: He has caused the most virtuous men to forsake the road commanded in the *Vedas;* and to follow their own inclinations. This achievement, however, belongs neither to Vice nor myself; for it was Your Majesty who inspired us with courage...

[35] *P* (Taylor) Intro. 4.

ed from this is itself a warning against its reliability. We may note the contradictions first and see how far an initial reliance on Madhava is responsible for these.

5. Anarchy in the Academic World

Modern writers on ancient Indian philosophy—and among them are included scholars of great eminence whose authority it is not easy to challenge—have arrived at the most extraordinarily contradictory conclusions with regard to the origin and significance of the Lokayata.

It has been conjectured that Lokayata was the result of the breakdown of traditional authority. Others thought that it was the cause of the consolidation thereof. Some concluded that Lokayata was originally imported into India from ancient Sumeria. Others thought that it originally formed part of the Indian priestcraft. It has even been claimed that Lokayata did not belong merely to the ancient times, for it still survives in the country in the form of certain obscure and highly obscene cults. As these interpretations of what the Lokayata might have meant are basically opposed to one another, we are not surprised to find the place of all being taken up by a scepticism which claimed that the Lokayata, as a branch of ancient Indian philosophy, never existed at all.

These are some evidences of the anarchic conditions prevalent in our academic world. We are going to examine the views in so far as these are the results of a reliance on Madhava's version of the Lokayata.

Radhakrishnan[36] has argued that the Lokayata was the characteristic intellectual product of the unsettled conditions of India during the 'epic period,' i.e., 600 B.C. to A.D. 200. It was an age when the faith of the centuries was crumbling down and the hold of authority on the people was being shattered. In such an atmosphere,

> ever so many metaphysical fancies and futile speculations were put forward. . . . We have the materialists with their insistence on the world of sense, the Buddhists with their valuable psychological teachings and high ethics.

Under these circumstances, materialism, with all its futility, was, nevertheless, playing a historic role: it was 'repudiating the old religion of custom and magic,' was 'declaring the spiritual

[36] IP i. 271-6.

independence of the individual' and rejecting the principle of authority.

> The Carvaka philosophy is a fanatical effort made to rid the age of the weight of the past that was oppressing it. The removal of dogmatism which it helped to effect was necessary to make room for the great constructive efforts of speculation.[37]

This conclusion has the virtue of simplicity. The simplicity, however, is the result of a rather rigid adherence to Madhava. The author has refused, as it were, to be influenced by any information about the Lokayata that did not fit in with Madhava's version of it. This explains why he agreed to supplement the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha* only by such texts as the *Prabodhacandrodaya* and the *Sarva Siddhanta Samgraha*: these too, like Madhava's work, were written from the standpoint of Vedantic idealism and the account of the Lokayata in all these was substantially the same. The essence of this account is thoroughly negative in character: the Lokayata denied the reliability of inference, the authority of the *Vedas*, the reality of God, soul and immortality, and it repudiated any moral value excepting the gross sensual pleasures of the moment. Concentrating exclusively on such an account the only question our author has considered worth asking is: How can we account for the origin of such an ultra-negative attitude in ancient India? The hypothesis of an age in which the faiths of the centuries were crumbling down and which, therefore, released a fanatic urge for free-thinking, served his purpose. The whole thing was, no doubt, an excess and a futility. Nevertheless, it played its historic role. It was necessary for our ancestors to be emancipated from the old religion of custom and magic in order to move forward to the great constructive efforts of speculation, and the Lokayata contributed to this emancipation.

J. Muir,[38] too, connected the Lokayata with the freedom of speculation in ancient India. But the connection, as conceived by him, was just the other way round. Far from being the effect of the breakdown of ancient faith, the Lokayata was, according to him, the cause of its consolidation. How did he arrive at this conclusion? Like Radhakrishnan, he too made the negativistic version of the Lokayata given by Madhava his starting point. But, unlike Radhakrishnan, he wanted to take seriously a little more of the evidences about the Lokayata and to squeeze

[37] *Ib.* i. 283. [38] JRAS xix. 299 ff.

these into the framework provided by Madhava. This made all the difference between the views of the two scholars.

On the evidence of the heretics and disbelievers referred to in *Rig-Veda*, Muir conjectured that the intellectual atmosphere of the country must have been characterised by a spirit of freedom of speculation from a very remote antiquity. Such an atmosphere must have continued for many centuries. Even at the time of the composition of the *Ramayana*, it was possible for one to remain a Brahmana and yet to go on preaching the Lokayata-views. This is evidenced by the Brahmana, Jabali, trying to persuade Ramacandra to heretical ideas.[39]

That such heretical views were essentially Lokayatika was argued by Muir on the basis of their similarities with the Lokayata-views as expounded by Madhava. And referring to the *Ramayana* evidence, he argued:

> Even after the Brahmanical system had been more firmly established, and its details more minutely prescribed, it is clear that the same strictness was not extended to speculation, but that if a Brahmana was only an observer of the established ceremonial, and an asserter of the privileges of his own order, he might entertain and even profess almost any philosophical opinion which he pleased.[40]

Subsequently, however, as the attacks from the heretics like the Lokayatikas and the Buddhists became sharper, 'when the authority of the sacred books was not merely tacitly set aside or undermined, but openly discarded or denied, and the institutions founded on them were abandoned and assailed,'[41] the orthodox party took the alarm and started enforcing such measures as put an end to the age-old atmosphere of the freedom of speculation. Lokayata-excess, thus, became the cause of the consolidation of ancient authority.

Dasgupta's conjecture concerning the origin and development of the Lokayata has no point in common with either of these two views. According to him, the Lokayata was originally a foreign belief imported into the country, though it underwent some modification in course of its subsequent development in India.

> Probably the *lokayata* doctrines had their beginnings in the preceding Sumerian civilisation in the then prevailing customs of adorning the dead and the doctrine of bodily survival after death. This later on became so far changed that it was argued that since the self and the body were identical and since the body was burnt after

[39] *Ib.* 303ff.
[40] *Ib.* 331. cf. Colebrooke ME i. 379. [41] *Ib.*

death, there could not be any survival after death and hence there could not be another world after death.[42]

We thus know that the *lokayata* views were very old... being current among the Sumerian people of pre-Aryan times.[43]

How did Dasgupta arrive at such an extraordinary conclusion? Because, like others, he started from Madhava's version of the Lokayata but, unlike others, wanted to emphasise the importance of an additional information about it, which, he thought, was to be found in the *Chandogya Upanisad.* A view identifying the self with the body was attributed by this *Upanisad* to the Asuras. Secondly, the *Upanisad* also mentioned a burial custom of the Asuras which, as interpreted by Dasgupta, meant

to adorn the dead body with fine clothes, good ornaments and provide food for it with which they probably thought that the dead would conquer the other world.[44]

Dasgupta identified the Asuras with the ancient Sumerians and thought that the burial custom referred to was characteristic only of them. On the other hand, the view identifying the self with the body easily reminded him of the Lokayata. However Lokayata, as understood by Madhava, not only denied any self over and above the body but also the survival after death in any form whatsoever. To reconcile the Upanisadic evidence with Madhava's picture of the Lokayata, therefore, he had to imagine that the beliefs and ideas underlying the burial custom of ancient Sumer, after being imported into India, underwent some kind of modification–the Indian custom of cremating the dead impressing upon the upholders of this belief that there could not be any survival after death.

Tucci, again, would not agree with all these. According to him, the Lokayata was originally only a part of the Indian priestcraft.

At its very beginnings this doctrine represented the science of the *purohita* who on earth assisted his King as in heaven Brihaspati assisted Indra: *artha* and *dharma* for a certain period followed the same way.[45]

By *artha* the author meant political economy, by *dharma* religious purity. But the two, he argued, could not go together very far; there were signs of a clash between the two in very early days.

[42] HIP iii. 529. [43] *Ib.* iii. 531. [44] *Ib.* iii. 528.
[45] PIPC 1925. 40.

But political intrigues and religious purity cannot go together and in fact signs of a real contrast between *artha* and *dharma* can be traced back to the times of Yajnavalkya and of Narada.[46]

This process eventually led to an open revolt of *artha* against *dharma*.

In course of time among the masters of this political science there were some who refused to acknowledge any authority to *dharma* and proclaimed that in this world of men, God and priests had not interfered. . . . As it happens in such a case the reaction of the *artha* against the *dharma* went further on: *artha* not only broke up any relation with *dharma* but rose against it.[47]

And this, Tucci conjectured, ultimately resulted in the transformation of the original school of *artha* into the heretical, hedonistic and materialistic philosophy which Madhava described for us.

What led him to this view? To begin with, he came across, in sources considerably older than Madhava, certain references to the Lokayata which went very much against Madhava's picture of it:

We find the Lokayata included in the list of the sciences studied by Brahmanas in the stereotyped formulas of the Pali or Sanskrit Buddhist texts: and according to the *Vinaya Pitaka* there were also some Buddhist monks who endeavoured to study it were it not that the Buddha prevented them.[48]

The evidences were already noticed by Rhys Davids who concluded that the Lokayata originally meant only *nature-lore*. Tucci, however, could not agree with this:

Loka never had in Sanskrit the meaning of nature for which is used *pradhana*, or *prakriti* or *svabhava;* so that Buddhist texts, when discussing cosmological questions, in order to avoid misunderstanding, are obliged to prefix to *loka* the word *bhajana*, when they conceive the cosmos as a material thing: while *loka* in itself has rather the meaning of human world or class of beings, *lokayatra, lokokti, lokavada, devaloka*. Therefore the interpretation we have to give to the name Lokayata is quite different. It is but a science which has for its only object the *loka*, that is this world; and this interpretation is quite in accordance with the Chinese translation of the word by Shun-she or Shun-su: 'those who follow the world or the customs of the world.' Therefore this Lokayata which has for its aim the *lokayatra* is the forerunner of *niti* and *arthasastra*, that is of a science which was attributed by Brahmanical sources, also to Brihaspati—from whom Lokayata is called Barhaspatya as well as *Barhaspatyamata*—had the meaning of *niti*.[49]

Whether this interpretation of the name is acceptable or

[46] *Ib*. 41. [47] *Ib*. [48] *Ib*. 40-1. [49] *Ib*. 40.

not, the facts referred to are certainly important. Lokayata being invariably mentioned in the list of sciences studied by the accomplished persons, is an evidence against Madhava. These could have, therefore, reasonably led our scholar to doubt the authenticity of Madhava. But he would not do it. The fidelity of the modern scholars to Madhava has been fundamental. Therefore, the only possibility that Tucci found himself left with, was to imagine a history of the conflict between *artha* and *dharma* which resulted in the transformation of the originally serious Lokayata into the Lokayata of Madhava's description.

Sastri[50] has argued that it would be wrong to view the Lokayata as belonging merely to some ancient period of Indian history. There survive in India even today living examples of the Lokayata sects. Arguing on the basis of certain remarkable evidences from the *Brihaspati Sutra* (recovered by Thomas) and the writings of the Jaina commentator Gunaratna, he discovered a close connection between the Lokayatikas and the followers of some obscure cults, called the Kapalikas. 'Brihaspati considers them as distinct sects but Gunaratna identifies the Kapalikas with the Lokayatikas.'[51] This by itself, is a startling observation; for the Kapalikas are not extinct even today. Sastri wanted to go a step further and argued:

> ...the influence of the Lokayatikas and the Kapalikas is still strong in India. There is a sect, and a numerous one too, the followers of which believe that *deha*, or the material human body, is all that should be cared for, and their religious practices are concerned with the union of men and women and their success (*siddhi*) varies according to the duration of the union. These call themselves Vaisnavas, but they do not believe in Visnu or Krisna or his incarnations. They believe in *deha*. They have another name, Sahajia, which is the name of a sect of Buddhists which arose from Mahayana in the last four centuries of its existence in India.[52]

If all these be true Madhava's presentation of the Lokayata must be at best doubtful. For, though it remains for us to see how far the Sahajia may actually be looked at as but a survival of degenerated Mahayana Buddhism, we know too much about it to identify it with the Lokayata as described by Madhava.[53] Assuming Lokayata to be the same as the Kapalika

[50] L 4 ff. [51] *Ib.* 6. [52] *Ib.*

[53] I do not mean that the views of the Sahajias could not have been proto-materialistic. But this proto-materialism (*deha-vada*) could not be the same as Madhava's description of Carvaka metaphysics.

and the Sahajia, we should be logically led to an outright rejection of Madhava. However, in spite of his own startling observation, Sastri himself did not propose to do so. His fidelity to Madhava was basic. 'The book,' he wrote, referring to the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*, 'early attracted my attention.... The versified portion of the account of the Carvakas I soon made my own. Curiosity impelled me to look to other reference.'[54] However, even when he perceived that the *other references* went against the evidence of the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*, the possibility did not occur to him to doubt Madhava and to reconstruct the Lokayata on the basis of a deeper understanding of the obscure cults like the Kapalika and the Sahajia. This led him to risk the internal consistency of his own statements. Madhava's version of the Lokayata remained his own and yet he spoke of the sameness of the Lokayatikas with the Sahajias and the Kapalikas.

D. R. Sastri,[55] whose *Short History of Indian Materialism, Sensationalism and Hedonism* has enjoyed considerable popularity in our academic circles, took up the suggestion of H. P. Sastri and tried to solve the problem suggested by his predecessor. The simplest way to do this was to argue that since the Lokayatikas, on Madhava's authority, were but natural degenerates, they easily affiliated themselves to the degenerated Buddhists, the Kapalikas, and the Sahajias, notorious for their erotic excesses. Degenerates attracted each other. D. R. Sastri wanted to argue this in more than one way:

> Some of the sects of degenerated Buddhists, in which laxity in sexual morals was one of the features, became gradually affiliated to the Lokayata school. One of these sects was the Kapalika sect. The Kapalikas are a very ancient sect. They drink wine, offer human sacrifices and enjoy women. They strive to attain their religious goal with the help of human corpses, wine and women... As *kama*, or the enjoyment of sensual pleasure was the goal of this sect, it came gradually to be affiliated to the Nastika form of the Lokayata school according to which the summum bonum of the human life is...the enjoyment of gross sensual pleasure.[56]
>
> After the great Brahmanic renaissance the Lokayata sect took shelter under different forms in different parts of India. In Bengal, an old sect of the Buddhist Mahayana school chiefly concerned with sexual romance gave up its independent existence and like the Svabhavavadins and the Kapalikas became at one with the Nastika Lokayatikas and the Lokayatikas on their part incorporated them-

[54] *Ib.* 1.

[55] The author's later contribution (HPEW ed. Radhakrishnan) does not clarify the points left unexplained in his well known work.

[56] HIMSH 35-6.

selves with that community. The old element of sensualism of the festival Madanotsava of the Nastikas, a sanction for the gratification of grosser pleasures, is still found to linger in this sect. The name of this sect is the Sahajia sect.[57]

Interestingly enough, according to the author, this combination of double degradation enjoyed the most widespread popularity in some period of our ancient history.

The Lokayatikas were a creed of joy, all sunny. Through their influence, at that period of Indian history the temple and the court, poetry and art, delighted in sensuousness. Eroticism prevailed all over the country. The Brahmin and the Candala, the king and the beggar took part with equal enthusiasm in Madanotsava, in which Madana or Kama was worshipped.[58]

The author has not told us what period of Indian history he was referring to. Nor did he betray any anxiety to enquire into the real significance of the festival called Madanotsava and the temple sculptures with erotic motif he was presumably referring to. Complex questions are obviously suggested by the indications of there being some connection of all these with the Lokayata views. D. R. Sastri, with an enviable simplicity, has only argued that all these must have been due to the widespread influence of the degenerated outlook of the Lokayatikas, this degeneration being already evidenced in the writings of Madhava.

After all these varied conjectures about the ancient Lokayata, it is but one step for some of the modern scholars to remove the whole problem from the realm of reality. This was actually accomplished long ago by Rhys Davids who, mainly on the basis of the Buddhistic sources, argued that neither the Lokayata-view nor its followers ever existed.

Throughout the whole story we have no evidence of any one who called himself a Lokayatika, or his own knowledge Lokayata. And of the real existence of a school of thought, or a system of philosophy that called itself by the name there is no trace.[59]

Nevertheless, we do come across in our ancient literatures, evidences of some people being called by the name Lokayatika, though by their philosophical opponents. Rhys Davids argued that these were references merely to the nature-lorists. Though originally looked at with reverence, the nature-lorists were ultimately looked down upon.

[57] *Ib.* 37. [58] *Ib.* 36. [59] DB i. 172.

After the early use of the word in some such sense as Nature-lore, folk-lore, there is a tone of unreality over all the statements we have... In the middle period, the riddles and quibbles of the Nature-lorists are despised. In the last period the words *Lokayata, Lokayatika,* became mere hobby horses, pegs on which certain writers could hang the views that they imputed to their adversaries, and gave them, in doing so, an odious name.[60]

Thus the problem of Lokayata was solved by denying its existence.

How far, it will be asked, was the reliance on Madhava really responsible for such a view? Apparently, the answer would be in the negative. For, Rhys Davids was the only modern scholar who definitely doubted the authenticity of Madhava.

Finally in the fourteenth century the great theologian Sayana-Madhava has a longish chapter in which he ascribes to the Lokayatikas the most extreme forms of the let-us-eat-and-drink-for-to-morrow-we-die view of life; of Pyrrhonism in philosophy, and of atheism in theology... His very able description has all the appearance of being drawn from his own imagination; and is chiefly based on certain infidel doggerel verses which cannot possibly have formed a part of the Lokayata studied by the Brahmanas of old. It is the ideal of what will happen to the man of some intellect, but morally so depraved that he will not accept the theosophist position.[61]

This is how Rhys Davids apparently wanted to reject Madhava. Really speaking, however, at the basis of his denial of the reality of the Lokayata philosophy there was only an exclusive reliance on Madhava. He failed to come across in the more ancient references to the Lokayata any system of philosophy that answered Madhava's description of it and as such the Lokayata itself appeared unreal to him. The reality of the Lokayata stood or fell with the veracity of Madhava's version of it. The Lokayata was unreal because the way in which Madhava described it could not have been real. The reliance on Madhava, though indirect, could not go any further.

The point is that he came across a considerable number of references to the Lokayata, particularly in the Buddhistic literatures, which rightly appeared to him to be irreconcilable with Madhava. If only he could liberate himself from the influence of Madhava, attach due importance to these informations obtained from the Buddhist sources and try to synthesise these with the informations available in the Jaina and other sources,

[60] *Ib.* [61] *Ib.*

our scholar would have probably found some new way of reconstructing the old Lokayata. However, with all his verbal protests against Madhava, he did not try this. Madhava, thus, remained the last word for our modern scholars.

6. Authenticity of Madhava

As our modern scholars have relied so much on Madhava and further, as this reliance has created so much of confusion among themselves, it is only logical for us to begin with an enquiry into the authenticity of his version of the Lokayata.

A preliminary doubt may be suggested against Madhava by pointing to the wide time-gap that separated him from the original Lokayata. In the early Buddhist sources like the *Kutadanta Sutta*[62] we come across the name Lokayata while in the equally early *Brahmajala Sutta*[63] we come across a definitely materialistic view that identified the body with the self. Judging from these and the deep concern felt by the early Buddhist authors for the Lokayatikas and their materialistic view, we may easily infer that the original Lokayata was flourishing as far back as the pre-Buddhist times. Madhava, on the other hand, belonged to the 14th century A.D. He was thus separated from the original Lokayata at least by two thousand years.

This preliminary doubt may be further strengthened by pointing to Madhava's pronounced political preoccupation. He was, like his brother Sayana, a founder-minister of the Vijayanagara Empire; it is presumed further that he obtained from a medieval monastery the necessary finance for establishing this empire.[64] This shows that he was himself very much in the thick of political activities which were likely to have influenced his philosophical enthusiasm. Philosophy was presumably the ideological counterpart of his practical politics. How could, then, an overt champion of aristocracy like Madhava, give us an undistorted picture of the Lokayata, which, as its name signified, embodied only the world-outlook of the masses?

In defence of Madhava, however, it will be argued that neither of the two points can carry special weight. The time-gap separating Madhava from the early Lokayatikas is evidently considerable. Yet one acquainted with the characteristic mode

[62] *Ib.* i. 178. [63] *Ib.* i. 46. [64] *VK* (B) xiv. 565.

of the development of Indian philosophical thought does not really expect spectacular changes to take place in a system even in course of centuries. The germs of the early Lokayata might have become, by the time of Madhava, highly elaborate and fairly systematised. But this hardly justifies the suspicion that the original Lokayata was bound to be qualitatively different from the later version of it.

Secondly, it is also a fact that Madhava had his own political preoccupations. But if this be looked at as the ground for rejecting Madhava, the conclusion would be that the Lokayata remains unknown and unknowable. For, the Lokayata has the misfortune of being known only through the versions of its opponents. Others who informed us about it might not have shared the political bias of Madhava. But they had at least a religious bias equally strong.

In spite of such defence, however, we cannot rely too literally on Madhava's version of the Lokayata. Evidences, both internal and external, are against it. The external evidences are decisive but the internal ones are not unimportant. We shall begin with these.

7. Madhava's Mode of Presentation

Cowell, in his introduction to the English translation of the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha,* said that Madhava, with regard to the views of his opponents, 'often displays some quaint humour as he throws himself for the time into the position of their advocate, and holds, as it were, a temporary brief in behalf of opinions entirely at variance with his own.'[65]

This is important. The ability referred to speaks of the speculative brilliance of Madhava. But this brilliance was at the cost of authenticity. He allowed himself to be carried away by the fascination of his own constructive imagination and wanted to establish himself, for the time being, in the position of the Lokayatikas themselves. That is why, he did not so much care to report what the Lokayatikas themselves claimed and how they actually argued. Instead of this, he was more interested in telling us *what he would himself say were he a Lokayatika and how he would himself have argued in defence of their philosophical standpoint.*

[65] *SDS* (Cowell) pref. vii.

This led to incongruities. The pattern of the Lokayata-argument must have been strongly opposed to his own. He was himself a Vedantist and the Vedantists had their own way of arguing. Yet Madhava did not hesitate to impose the Vedantic pattern of arguing on the Lokayatikas.

To the Vedantist *sruti* or revelation was the highest authority. Arguments alone could not prove any thesis; these had validity only as subservient to *sruti*. Therefore, for a Vedantist, the surest proof for a statement is some quotation from the Upanisadic texts. But this was exactly the opposite of the Lokayatika attitude. Even on Madhava's own admission, the Lokayatikas looked at the *sruti* as but fabrications of the lazy cheats.

Under these circumstances, the idea of the Lokayatikas quoting the Upanisad is no less peculiar than the proverbial devil quoting scripture. Yet Madhava, the Vedantist, was so much carried away by his own individuality that he did not hesitate to make the Lokayatikas quote the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad* in support of their own position:

> In this school the four elements, earth, etc., are the original principles; from these alone, when transformed into the body, intelligence is produced, just as the inebriating power is developed from the mixing of certain ingredients; and when these are destroyed, intelligence at once perishes also. They quote the *sruti* for this (*Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad* ii.4.12). 'Springing forth from these elements, itself solid knowledge, it is destroyed when they are destroyed,—after death no intelligence remains.'[66]

Whatever might have been the real implication of the Upanisadic passage, this is certainly not the way the Lokayatikas themselves would have argued.

8. Lokayata Epistemology

It is generally assumed that the Lokayata denied the validity of inference. The idea is derived mainly from Madhava's treatment of the Lokayata-epistemology. In the terminologies of European logic, this argument against the validity of inference may be summed up as follows:

Inference presupposes a universal relation (*vyapti*) between the middle term (*linga*) and the major terms (*sadhya*). But this *vyapti* is an undue assumption. No source of valid knowledge can guarantee it. The nearest parallel of this in European logic is Hume's denial of the universal and necessary relation.

[66] *Ib.* 2-3.

Thus, for example, the inference of fire (*sadhya*) from smoke (*linga*) can be valid only when it is established that all cases of smoke are cases of fire (*vyapti*). But there is no source of valid knowledge that can justify this universal relation. Perception cannot do it, because it is limited only to the particulars. Inference, being itself dependent upon *vyapti*, cannot generate it. Testimony and the other so-called sources of valid knowledge, being after all inferential, are similarly incapable of being the basis of *vyapti*. Therefore, inference is not possible. The last word of the Lokayata-epistemology, as represented by Madhava, is thus direct sense-perception.

It becomes somewhat easy to refute the Lokayatikas if their epistemology is reduced to this. All arguments depend on *vyapti*, and as such, the denial of *vyapti* amounts to the declaration of a non-confidence in argument as such. But the Lokayatikas had themselves to argue their own case and were therefore involved in self-contradictions. As Madhava himself, while arguing against the Lokayatikas from the Buddhist point of view, said:

If a man does not allow that inference is a form of evidence, *pramana*, one may reply: You merely assert thus much, that inference is not a form of evidence: do you allege no proof of this, or do you allege any? The former alternative is not allowable according to the maxim that bare assertion is no proof of the matter asserted. Nor is the latter alternative any better, for if while you assert that inference is no form of evidence, you produce some truncated argument (to prove, i.e., infer, that it is none), you will be involved in an absurdity, just as if you asserted your own mother to be barren ... When you deny the existence of any object on the ground of its not being perceived, you yourself admit an inference of which non-perception is the middle term.[67]

Further Udayana, a medieval philosopher of the Nyaya School, argued that the Lokayata-claim would make even our practical life impossible:

If this doctrine is consistently applied and people begin to disbelieve all that they do not perceive at any particular time, then all our practical life will be seriously disturbed and upset.[68]

The question is, how far can we really rely on this representation of the Lokayata-epistemology? Did the Lokayatikas really argue against the validity of inference in this absolute sense which made not only the science of logic, but also practical life a sheer impossibility. Circumstantial evidences lead

[67] *Ib.* 14.
[68] Quot. by Dasgupta HIP iii. 539.

us to a negative answer, showing thereby that the picture of the Lokayata-epistemology given by Madhava was largely fanciful.

We are going to argue that rather than maintaining a purely destructive attitude to arguments as such the Lokayatikas were probably the earliest logicians in India, and, further, it is wrong to imagine that they were using arguments for destructive purposes alone.

Buddhaghosa described the Lokayata as *vitanda-vada-sattha. Sattha,* in Pali, meant *sastra* in Sanskrit, roughly equivalent to a science or a branch of study. Thus Lokayata, according to Buddhaghosa, was the science of *vitanda* and *vada.* These two words referred to disputations or arguments though, according to the Nyaya School, in two opposite senses.

> *Vitanda* means tricky disputation and it is defined. . . .as that kind of tricky logical discussion (*jalpa*) which is intended only to criticise the opponent's thesis without establishing any other counter-thesis,. . . .and it is thus to be distinguished from *vada* which means a logical discussion undertaken in all fairness for upholding a particular thesis.[69]

Having this distinction in mind, Dasgupta has raised the question, how could the Lokayata be a *sattha* of both *vitanda* and *vada?* He found the answer in the suggestion of Jayanta, another medieval philosopher belinging to the Nyaya School, according to whom the Buddhists did not distinguish between *vitanda* and *vada,* both being empty sophistry to them. Thus, observed Dasgupta, 'Lokayata, though consisting of *vitanda,* could also be designated as *vada* in Buddhist literature,' in the special Buddhist sense. That is, Lokayata meant only destructive argument, tricky but useless.

> Thus, from the above and from many other passages from the Pali texts it is certain that the Lokayata means a kind of tricky disputation, sophistry or casuistry practised by the non-Buddhists, which not only did not lead to any useful results but did not increase true wisdom and led us away from the path of Heaven and of release. The common people were fond of such tricky discourses and there was a systematic science (*sastra* or *sattha*) dealing with this subject, despised by the Buddhists and called the *vitanda-sattha.*[70]

This might have been one solution of the problem. But the other possibility is not wholly ruled out. It might as well have been that the Lokayatikas knew the two forms of argument, both destructive and constructive, that is *vitanda* and *vada* in the usually accepted senses. It will be argued that this could not

[69] *Ib.* iii. 512. [70] *Ib.* iii. 514.

have been so. Some of the Buddhist sources themselves give us the impression that Lokayata meant merely empty, though tricky, disputations. Nevertheless, there is a tone of unreality about such descriptions. For, arguments obviously absurd, and not really too clever, were attributed by such Buddhist sources to the Lokayatikas. Here is a specimen: 'The crows are white because their bones are white; the cranes are red because their blood is red.'[71] That the arguments of the Lokayatikas could not be as naive and spurious as all these is evidenced by the following:

Sukra Niti Sara,[72] in its list of the sciences and arts, mentioned the *nastikas* as very strong in logical arguments. These *nastikas* are usually taken to be the Lokayatikas. The *sastra* of the *nastikas,* according to the text, denied God and the authority of the *Vedas*. This was of course employing arguments merely for destructive purposes. But according to the *Sukra Niti Sara* itself, these *nastikas* had also their positive thesis: *sarvam svabhavikam matam,* that is, the doctrine according to which everything is governed by natural laws. We have, thus, here a possible reference to not only a positive attitude of the Lokayatikas to the validity of reasoning or arguments, but also to the employment of such arguments for the purpose of defending a positive thesis.

Kautilya,[73] in his *Arthasastra,* mentioned, along with Sankhya and Yoga, the Lokayata and called it the science of logic, *anviksiki*. Medhatithi,[74] commenting upon Manu, spoke of the *tarkavidya* of the Carvakas. Manu[75] himself mentioned the *hetusastra* (logic) and the *haitukas* (logicians) and Dasgupta[76] has rightly pointed out that these were presumably references to the Lokayata and the Lokayatikas. For, though the philosophers of the Nyaya and the Mimamsa schools, too, were often referred to as *haitukas* and *tarkis,* they were logicians within the framework of orthodoxy, whereas the logicians mentioned by Manu were *nastikas,* i.e. heretics from the Vedic point of view. The *Bhagavata Purana,*[77] too, mentioned the *haitukas* and this along with the Buddhists and Jainas (for whom the *Purana* used the word *pasandi*).

It is true that Manu[78] advocated very strong legal measures

[71] *SV*. i. 91. See Dasgupta HIP. iii. 515, Rhys Davids DB i. 167-8.
[72] iv. 3. 55. [73] i. 1. [74] on *Manu* vii. 43.
[75] ii. 11. [76] HIP iii. 518. [77] xi. 18. 30.
[78] iv. 30; ii. 11, etc.

against these logicians: one should not even speak with the heretics (*pasandins*), transgressors of caste discipline (*vikarmasthas*), hypocrites (*vaidala vratikas*), and the *haitukas* or the logicians. The reason, however, was not that these *haitukas* were opposed to the validity of reasoning as such or that they were mere sophists; the reason rather was that these logicians, with the aid of their arguments, were disproving the other world, the sacrificial creed and the authority of the *Vedas*. The best-known commentators on Manu made this point quite clear. The *haitukas* (mentioned by Manu), according to Medhatithi,[79] were those that were denying the next world and the efficacy of gifts and sacrifices. Kullukabhatta[80] simply said that the *haitukas* were *veda virodhi tarka vyavaharinah*, that is, those who were opposed to the *Vedas* and were employing reasonings and arguments precisely for the sake of this opposition. The evidence of Manu, therefore, cannot prove that the Lokayatikas maintained a purely negativistic attitude to the validity of reasoning, unless a positive attitude to the validity of reasoning means only a dogmatic surrender to the authority of the scriptures.

All these do not imply that in Indian philosophy we do not come across a purely negative or destructive attitude to the validity of reasoning as such. We do. Interestingly, however, it was the attitude of the very school of philosophy to which Madhava himself belonged. According to the Vedanta[81] alone reasoning is intrinsically invalid: reasoning depends upon the individual capacity of the person arguing and, therefore, on the basis of arguments, what is proved by one can be disproved by another.

It has been conjectured that the Vedantic denial of the validity of reasoning or arguments was provoked, though negatively, by the Lokayatikas themselves. Pestered by the Lokayata arguments, which lured men away from the path to heaven and liberation, orthodoxy found it necessary, as it were, to deny logic in order to make room for faith. As Dasgupta[82] has said,

> ... it is possible that the doctrine of the orthodox Hindu philosophy, that the ultimate truth can be ascertained only by an appeal to the scriptural texts, since no finality can be reached by arguments or inferences because what may be proved by one logician may be controverted by another logician, and that disproved by yet another logician, can be traced to the negative influence of the sophists or

[79] on *Manu* iv. 30.
[80] on *Manu* iv. 30.
[81] *Br Su* ii. 1. 11.
[82] HIP iii. 517.

logicians who succeeded in proving theses which were disproved by others, whose findings were further contradicted by more expert logicians.

According to Dasgupta, these early logicians (*haitukas*) were the same as the Lokayatikas. Thus the orthodox denial of the validity of reasoning was traced to the negative influence of the Lokayatikas.

Assuming this to be true, it cannot be argued, as Madhava did, that the Lokayatikas were maintaining a purely destructive attitude to reasoning as such. On the contrary, Madhava, being himself a Vedantist, was maintaining such a destructive or negative attitude. He imputed this very negative attitude to the Lokayatikas in a somewhat peculiar, though apparently convincing, manner. This was possible for Madhava because there are grounds to presume, as we shall presently see, that the Lokayatikas were really objecting to the inferential process not as such, but in the special sense in which it claimed to prove the reality of God, soul and the other world.

But Dasgupta's suggestion that the orthodox denial of the validity of reasoning could be traced negatively to the influence of the Lokayatikas, cannot be readily admitted. It rests upon the assumption that the Lokayatikas were only sophists and quibblers of words, employing reason for destructive purposes alone. That the Lokayatikas denied many a tenet of orthodox Brahmanism is not doubted. But the question is: Is any argument disproving heaven, liberation and the efficacy of the Vedic sacrifices to be considered destructive and useless sophistry? There was a time when this was a part of the accepted assumptions of the orthodox circle. But there is no reason why a historian of Indian philosophy should share the view today.

But, it will be argued, we have no evidence of the Lokayatikas employing their arguments for constructive purposes. The only evidence that we have are evidences in which the Lokayatikas were employing reasoning for the purpose of denying something or the other. As H. P. Sastri[83] said, 'they have few doctrines to defend but a lot to assail, and in the matter of assailing, they are bold, direct and exceedingly sarcastic.' There is no doubt that this is the impression that we have about the Lokayatikas. But the sources of our information are peculiar.

[83] L 4.

Our impression of the Lokayatikas is derived from their philosophical opponents. And these opponents were busy defending themselves against the Lokayata-onslaughts directed against them. They had obviously no other occasion to refer to the Lokayata views. In other words, what we have are only answers to the Lokayata criticisms of certain positive contentions of the rival philosophers, or more strictly, of rival schools of philosophy. This has given us the idea that the Lokayatikas were only criticising others and they had hardly anything positive to defend. However, this is only a limitation of our knowledge of the Lokayata and it would be wrong to consider it to be a basic characteristic of the Lokayata standpoint.

Thanks to the laborious researches of Dasgupta[84] himself, even this limitation of our knowledge is now partially removed. He has salvaged for us a valuable piece of information concerning the positive attitude of the Lokayatikas to the inferential process. The special importance of this evidence is derived from the circumstance that here we have the Lokayata-standpoint explained by one who was himself a Lokayatika. His name is Purandara. We have already seen how Tucci has argued that this Purandara was himself an author of texts written from the Carvaka point of view, *carvaka-mate-granthakarta*. Dasgupta, agreed to it and wanted to place him in 7th century A.D. This date is of course comparatively late. However, himself belonging to the Lokayata school, he was presumably only carrying forward the real Lokayata tradition. Dasgupta[85] summed up Purandara's position as follows:

Purandara.... admits the usefulness of inference in determining the nature of all worldly things where perceptual experience is available; but inference cannot be employed for establishing any dogma regarding the transcendental world, or life after death or the laws of *karma* which cannot be available to ordinary perceptual experience.

Purandarah tu aha, lokaprasiddham anumanam carvakaih api isyate eva, yat tu kaih cit laukikam margam atikramya anumanam ucyate tan nisidhvate.[86]

This means: But Purandara said that even according to the Carvakas inference was valid within the range of the empirically known world; if, however, one proposed to extend its application

[84] HIP iii. 536. [85] *Ib.* [86] *Ib.*

beyond the range of the this-worldly objects, one's claim would be a forbidden one.

And this was not a dogmatic assertion on the part of Purandara. Dasgupta himself has tried to explain the grounds of Purandara, following the suggestions of Vadideva Suri, the Jaina author, who also quoted a *sutra* of Purandara:

> The main reason for upholding such a distinction between the validity of inference in our practical life of ordinary experience, and in ascertaining transcending truths beyond experience, lies in this, that an inductive generalisation is made by observing a large number of cases of agreement in presence together with agreement in absence, and no case of agreement in presence can be observed in the transcendent sphere; for even if such spheres existed they could not be perceived by the senses. Thus, since in the supposed supra-sensuous transcendent world no case of a *hetu* agreeing with the presence of its *sadhya* can be observed, no inductive generalisation or law of concomitance can be made relating to this sphere.[87]

Thus, according to the impression which Vadideva Suri gave us about the Lokayata epistemology, the inferential process was only secondary (*gauna*) in importance. The Lokayatikas wanted to attribute primacy to sense-perception. Manibhadra,[88] in his commentary on *Sat Darsana Samuccaya,* gave some extremely striking reasons for the Lokayata-emphasis on the primacy of sense-perception. The reasons are socio-political and appear to be strangely modern. There are cunning deceptors, in religious garbs, trying to generate in the minds of the people illusions concerning the attainment of heaven and the discrimination between the good and the bad; and they are trying to establish their claims on the basis of futile references to such sources of valid knowledge as inference, scriptures, etc. The Lokayata insistence on the primacy of sense-perception was meant to be a defence against such deception and exploitation. Being the philosophy of the people it wanted to warn the people against the dangers of religious exploitation. If, as Manibhadra went on explaining the Lokayata point of view, the unperceived, too, were given the status of existence then the poor could as well delude themselves with the idea of possessing a heap of gold and as such they would trample over their sense of poverty with a kind of indifference; the slave, too, would delude himself with the idea that he had become the master. Such delusions, like the illusions generated by the religious deceptors, would be fatal for the people and since the religious deceptors, in defence of

87 *Ib.* 88 on *SatDS* v. 81.

the existence of the unperceived, were talking too much of inference and testimony, the Lokayatikas were obliged to argue in favour of the primacy of sense-perception. Thus, if the defenders of orthodox religion found it necessary to deny reason in order to make room for faith, the Lokayatikas found it equally necessary to argue against the spurious claims of the deceptors in defence of the people.

The full picture that we have, therefore, is not the picture of certain isolated sophists indulging in useless disputations; it is rather the picture of a clash of two cultures. The exponents of one were preaching God, heaven and immortality and, as a means to attain these, the efficacy of the Vedic sacrifices. The other represented the standpoint of the people and was trying to defend their material interests. If we admit, and we have already seen that there are sufficiently strong grounds in favour of it, that the Lokayatikas were the first logicians of this country, we may be led to presume further that the birth of Indian logic was linked up with the defence of popular interest against religious deceptions. But more of this later. For we are yet to enquire into the questions concerning the origin of these religious deceptions.

How far we can actually depend upon Manibhadra in thus connecting the Lokayata-epistemology with the class interest of the people is of course a different matter. However, one point is sufficiently clear. The purely destructive or negative character of the Lokayata-epistemology, as depicted by Madhava, was fictitious. And, since Madhava derived the metaphysics as well as the ethics of the Lokayatikas from this imaginary epistemology, his picture of the Lokayata is likely to be grossly unreliable.

9. Lokayata Ethics

'The philosophy of pleasure,' wrote Marx,[89] 'was never anything else but the clever language of certain pleasure-privileged social classes.' If this be true, and if, further, Lokayata, as its etymology indicates, was only the philosophy of the people—the *prakrita janah* or the crude mob, as Samkara contemptuously characterised them—then the chance of this being the philosophy of pleasure becomes really a remote one. Yet, as described by Madhava, it was but the most extreme form of such a philosophy. Madhava[90] described the Lokayata ethics as follows:

[89] Quot. by Hook FHM 316. [90] *SDS* (Cowell) 3.

The only end of man is enjoyment produced by sensual pleasure. Nor may you say that such cannot be called the end of man as they are always mixed with some kind of pain, because it is our wisdom to enjoy the pure pleasure as far as we can, and to avoid the pain which inevitably accompanies it; just as the man who desires fish takes the fish with their scales and bones, and having taken as many as he wants, desists; or just as the man who desires rice, takes the rice, straw and all, and having taken as much as he wants, desists. It is not therefore for us, through a fear of pain, to reject the pleasure which our nature instinctively recognises as congenial. Men do not refrain from sowing rice, because forsooth there are wild animals to devour it; nor do they refuse to set the cooking-pots on the fire, because forsooth there are beggars to pester us for a share of the contents.

And, thus is the well known verse attributed to the Lokayatikas: '*While life remains, let a man live happily; let him feed on* ghee *even though he runs in debt.*'

We are going to argue that such a representation of the Lokayata ethics was only a vilification. Lokayata itself, in all presumption, could not have stood for such a crude craving for sensual pleasures.

We shall begin with certain points already argued by our modern scholars. Garbe[91] wrote:

It is natural to conjecture that the Lokayata system was based by its founder upon deeper principles, and developed upon more serious philosophical lines than the information which has come to us from their opponents allows us to understand.

This is true. But the question is, why is it natural to conjecture this? Belvalkar and Ranade[92] have given us the answer:

. . . its great seductive charm and extensive vogue cannot be readily explained on the usual assumption regarding the purely negative and destructive character of its tenets.

The reason why these scholars did not add that the usual assumptions like these were primarily due to the influence of Madhava's picture of the Lokayata, is perhaps that the point is rather obvious.

Many evidences may be mentioned to show that the influence of the Lokayata views was deep and widespread. The name Lokayata is itself one: it meant that which was spread among the people. The zeal of the philosophical opponents to distort, disparage and refute Lokayata was possibly another: there was scarcely any philosophical school in ancient India that did not try all these. If Lokayata was simply as superficial a proposal as to making merry even on debts, we cannot explain how it could

91 ERE viii. 138, cf. Nehru DI 100. 92 HIP ii. 459.

have such a deep and widespread influence, or, why all the schools of Indian philosophy had to take it so seriously.

But we have more direct evidences to argue against Madhava's representation of the Lokayata-ethics.

In the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata*,[93] Draupadi said that when she was a child, her father invited a Brahmana to live with them. It was from him that her father as well as her brothers received instructions in the Barhaspatya views: 'O king,' Draupadi went on addressing Yudhisthira, 'when, with the intention of listening to this view, I approached my father under the pretext of some useful work and settled myself on his lap, the Brahmana preceptor, with affection and tenderness, used to tell me all about it.'

Barhaspatya was but an alternative name for the Lokayata. To deny this, we have to question our ancient tradition seriously. Nor can it be argued that by the Barhaspatyamata was meant here the ancient science of the state-craft, as Tucci contended. For there is nothing intrinsically heretical about the so-called science of the state-craft, whereas, in the *Mahabharata*,[94] Yudhisthira, after listening to the views of Draupadi, actually accused her of being influenced by heretical ideas. Thus the Barhaspatyamata referred to could only be the Lokayata-views. But does this *Mahabharata* evidence agree with the picture of the Lokayata given by Madhava? Obviously not. Had Lokayata merely been what Madhava wanted us to believe, a respectable person like Draupadi's father would have scarcely felt the need of specially inviting a learned Brahmana to teach these views.

This learned teacher of the Lokayata-views is said to have been a Brahmana. This may look rather strange. It goes against not only our accepted notion of the Lokayata but also that of a Brahmana. Yet the Buddhist sources appeared to go a step further. As Rhys Davids[95] has shown,

> the description of the good Brahmana as put, in the Buddhist *suttas*, into the mouth of Brahmanas themselves, (*Anguttara*, i. 163. and other passages), mentions Lokayata as one branch of his learning. The whole paragraph is complimentary. And though the exact connotation of one or two of the other terms is doubtful they are all descriptive of just those things which a Brahmana would have been rightly proud to be judged a master of.

Further, Rhys Davids[96] has pointed out, in a passage of the *Mahabharata* (which also occurs in the *Harivamsa*), 'at

[93] *M*—(Ray) iii. 97. [94] *Ib*. iii. 89. [95] DB i. 166. [96] *Ib*. i. 169.

the end of a list of the accomplishments of learned Brahmanas, they are said to be masters of the Lokayata.'

Evidences like these perhaps indicate that we are in need of revising our notion of the Brahmana, particularly of the Brahmana of Buddhist India.[97] They also call forth a necessary revision of our notion of the Lokayata derived from Madhava. For these are evidences not merely of some Brahmana's professing and preaching the knowledge of Lokayata, but of *learned* and *distinguished* ones doing so. The knowledge of Lokayata, in other words, was considered vital to the accomplished mind, a mark of culture and knowledge. The Lokayata-views, therefore, could hardly have been the expression of the instinctive vulgarities of the pleasure-seeking mob, as Madhava wanted us to believe.

That it could not have been so is indicated by other sources, too. In the *Milinda*,[98], a knowledge of the Lokayata was ascribed to the hero of the story, Nagasena. This was definitely meant to be a compliment, though, in another passage, which Rhys Davids[99] has considered 'a gloss which has crept into the text,' the word *lokayatika* is used in a derogatory sense. Further, the Lokayatika was mentioned in the long list of the hermits given in Bana's *Harsacarita* :[100]

> The holy man's presence was suddenly announced by the king's seeing various Buddhists from various provinces seated in different situation.... Jainas in white robes, white mendicants, followers of Krishna, religious students, ascetics, who pulled out their hair, followers of Kapila, Jainas, Lokayatikas, followers of Kanada, followers of the Upanisads, believers in God as a Creator.....

Surely this setting in which the Lokayatikas were placed went very much against their picture in the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha.*

We are thus obliged to reject Madhava's presentation of the Lokayata ethics. But the question is: is there any other source from which we may have at least some rough indication of the positive moral values upheld by the Lokayatikas? Possibly there are some, though the indications are largely indirect.

Let us begin with the well known episode of the killing of Carvaka, which occurs in the *Santiparva* of the *Mahabharata.*[101]

After the great Kuruksetra war, when the Pandava brothers were returning triumphantly, thousands of Brahmanas gathered at the city-gate to bestow blessing on Yudhisthira. Among them

[97] See Fick SONEIBT ch. viii. [98] See Rhys Davids DB i. 170.
[99] *Ib.* [100] Tr. Cowell & Thomas 236. [101] *M* (Ray) xii. i. 120 ff.

was Carvaka. He moved forward and, without the consent of the rest of the Brahmanas, addressed the king thus:

> This assembly of the Brahmanas is cursing you for *you have killed your kins*. What have you gained by *destroying your own people and murdering your own elders?* You should die.

This outburst of Carvaka, abrupt that it was, stunned the assembled Brahmanas. Yudhisthira felt mortally wounded and wanted to die. But then the other Brahmanas regained their senses and told the king that Carvaka, rather than being their real representative, was only a demon in disguise and a friend of the king's enemy, Duryodhana. They assured the king that the real Brahmanas had only admiration for his great deeds. And then they burnt him, the dissenting Carvaka, to ashes.

The story of Carvaka being a demon in disguise, a secret agent of the wicked Duryodhana, etc., is maliciously fanciful and much too crude to be accepted seriously. Yet the point is that Carvaka and Lokayata were but names interchangeable, and, as such, it may not be very wrong to seek here,—in what Carvaka said,—the indications of the real Lokayata-ethics.

Carvaka, in this *Mahabharata* passage, did not say anything that may give us even a remote impression of the let-us-eat-and-drink-for-tomorrow-we-die view of life. On the other hand, if we are at all justified in speaking of any moral value underlying these words, it was distinctively tribal, of those that lived in kinship or gentile organisation. For the dark deed of which Yudhisthira was accused by Carvaka was that of destroying the relatives and murdering the elders. It was not the general charge of destroying human lives, in which case Carvaka's stand could have been described as one of *ahimsa* or non-violence. It was, rather, the specific charge of *killing the kins* and that is why we look at it as an expression of the moral standard distinctive of the tribal society:

> Throughout the history of tribal society, clan-kinship is of all ties the most sacred. The horror excited by homicide within the clan is well-described by Gronbech, writing of the primitive Norsemen: 'from the moment we enter into the clan, the sacredness of life rises up in absolute inviolability, with its judgement upon bloodshed as sacrilege, blindness, suicide. The reaction comes as suddenly and unmistakably as when a nerve is touched by a needle.'[102].

In the Kuruksetra war it was all very different. It was a war between brothers. Kins had to be killed. The old moral

[102] Thomson AA 34-5.

values of the tribal society were being trampled upon and destroyed. Thus Carvaka's protest against all these was outspoken and courageous. He was burnt to ashes and the moral standards had to be revised and restated to suit the new situation. We find it done in the *Gita*. Arjuna, on the eve of the Kuruksetra war, was sad and depressed. He found himself faced with the problem of killing his kins and destroying his elders. He would not fight. So Krisna had to elevate his soul to lofty metaphysical heights from where such killings could be justified. But before such heights could be reached, Krisna had to dwell on the more matter-of-fact and mundane consideration. He argued:

> You will attain heaven if you are killed in this battle, and, if you win it, you will enjoy this earth.[103]

This was quite outspoken. There was the prospect of pleasure in either alternative—pleasure on earth if you could kill your kins and pleasure in heaven if you are yourself killed. And this was probably the earliest expression of a real ethics of pleasure in the history of Indian philosophical thought. But the ethics of the Carvakas, at least judged on the basis of the *Mahabharata*-evidence, was an open protest against this. Could it, therefore, be that those who were accusing the Lokayatikas of a gross philosophy of pleasure were themselves subscribing to it, though surreptitiously?

10. Metaphysics

We are going to argue that the world-outlook of the Lokayatikas, though basically this-worldly and materialistic, was not exactly the materialistic metaphysics attributed to them by Madhava. The fundamental feature of the Lokayata-materialism was *deha-vada,* the view that the self was nothing but the body. This *deha-vada* of the Lokayatikas might have been the same as the *deha-vada* of original Tantrism. An analysis of the Lokayata-cosmogony, too, bears out its relationship to Tantrism.

This argument is bound to be a complex one, and it is necessary to engage into lengthy digressions to substantiate it. It would, therefore, be useful to enumerate at the beginning the different steps of this argument.

Our argument will consist of the following steps:

1) Lokayata could not have orginally meant a sceptical or

[103] *Gita* ii. 37.

materialistic philosophy in the sense in which we ordinarily use the term.

2) It was possibly a broad word used to refer to the popular 'cults,' which, though opposed to the Brahmanical rituals, were nevertheless characterised by rituals of a this-worldly character.

3) The followers of the Brahmanical culture called Lokayata the Asura-view; it may, therefore, be possible to arrive at an idea of the original Lokayata by analysing what was described as the Asura-views in the Brahmanical sources.

4) Two prominent features of this Asura-view were the *deha-vada* and a peculiar cosmogony. Both point to a possible relationship between original Lokayata and original Tantrism. The identification of the Lokayata with original Tantrism may appear to be most peculiar. This seems so only because our notions concerning both these ideas are wrong.

11. Lokayata and Rituals

There is no doubt that the Lokayatikas denied the authority of *sruti* and *smriti,* ridiculed the Brahmanical rituals and mocked at the idea of the other-world or heaven. Practically all the sources of our information about Lokayata agree on these points. It is because of the Lokayata-criticism of Brahmanical orthodoxy that our scholars have too readily imagined that the Lokayatikas were the ancient sophists, sceptics or atheists in the senses in which we employ these words today. But that is doubtful. By sophists and sceptics we understand certain individual philosophers whereas it may be that Lokayata had never been a philosophy preached by a few individuals. In all probability, it was a body of beliefs and practices, deeply rooted in the lives of the masses and at the same time hostile to the Brahmanical doctrines.

That the Lokayatikas were opposed to the Brahmanical rituals does not necessarily mean that they were opposed to rituals as such; the conflict could have been because they wanted to stick to their own rituals and these rituals were rooted in a set of beliefs with which orthodox Brahmanism was in direct conflict. At the same time, Lokayata was essentially materialistic in the sense of acknowledging the reality of nothing but the material human body and the material universe around us. If, therefore, the Lokayatikas had at all practised any rituals, such rituals could have had little to do with other-

worldliness. This point will apear to us as rather peculiar because we are used to think that rituals are necessarily religious, and as such, based on an other-worldly outlook. We shall return later to discuss the question how rituals could be essentially this-worldly. For the present we shall only try to show, on fairly ancient evidences, that Lokayata was, on the one hand, definitely an expression of a this-worldly attitude, while, on the other, it was also definitely associated with certain type of rituals.

Let us briefly mention the two groups of evidences.

First, the Lokayata rejection of other-worldliness. It is indeed not necessary to mention too many evidences to prove this. These are in fact well known and will not be seriously contested by any one. We shall mention here only one interesting evidence, because it is not usually discussed. According to the traditional commentators of Manu, the law-giver was referring to the Lokayatikas by at least two distinct words. These were *nastikas* and *haitukas*. Medhatiti, e.g. rendered both the words as Lokayatikas, and, the typical formula which, according to Medhatiti, expressed their standpoint, was: *nasti dattam nasti hutam nasti paralokam iti.* It means, 'there is (no meaning of) gifts, no (efficacy of) sacrificial offerings and no next world.' Thus, in interpreting Manu III. 150 and VIII. 22, Medhatiti said that the *nastikas* were but 'the Lokayatikas and others' and he attributed the above formula to them in interpreting Manu III. 150 and VIII. 309. And the same formula was attributed by him to the *haitukas* while interpreting, Manu IV. 30. All these prove that the Lokayatikas, called the *haitukas* or *nastikas*, were entertaining a materialistic or this-worldly attitude. Of course the date of Medhatiti is not very old. Kane has placed him in A.D. 900, while, according to him the date of Manu was somewhere between 200 B.C.–200 A.D. Yet we have no reason to doubt the authority of Medhatiti. For there is neither any alternative interpretation of these two words nor is there any evidence to show that the Lokayatikas really believed in gifts, sacrificial offerings and the other-world.

Secondly, in spite of this rejection of the other-worldly, the Lokayatikas had presumably some kind of rituals of their own. We shall mention three interesting evidences.

In the Buddhist text *Saddharma Pundarika,*[104] we come across a peculiar passage in which the words *lokayata-mantra-*

[104] SBE xxi. 263.

dharaka and *lokayatika* are mentioned together, though disparagingly. As translated by Kern,[105] the passage stands as follows:

> ... when he does not serve, not court, not wait upon adepts at worldly spells (*lokayata-mantra-dharaka*) and votaries of a world-philosophy (*lokayatika*) ....

What was meant by this peculiar expression *lokayata-mantra-dharka*, 'adepts at wordly spells'? It is not possible to give the exact answer. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Lokayatikas were referred to by this. So it is clear that they were practising some kind of spell (*mantra*).

In another Buddhist text called the *Divyavadana*[106] we come across this peculiar phrase: *lokayata-yajna-mantresu-nisnatah*. It may mean either of the following: 1) expert in *lokayata-yajna* (ritual) and *mantra* (spell); expert in the *yajna* and *mantra* of Lokayata (type); 3) expert in the *mantras* of the *lokayata-yajna*.

Even accepting the first meaning, we cannot entirely ignore the suggestion of there being a close relation between *lokayata*, *yajna* and *mantra*. Presumably, the Lokayata was connected with some sort of ritual and spell.

To this may be added the evidence of the *Vinaya Pitaka* which definitely indicated that the Lokayata, as understood by the ancient Buddhists, was largely a matter of magic spells. The following passage is to be found in *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka*:[107]

> Now at that time the Chabbaggiyá Bhikkhus learnt the Lokayata system.
> People murmured, etc., saying, 'Like those who still enjoy the pleasures of the world!'
> The Bhikkhus heard of the people thus murmuring; and those Bhikkhus told the matter to the Blessed One.
> 'Now can a man who holds the Lokayata as valuable reach up, O Bhikkhus, to the full advantage of, or attain to full growth in, to full breadth in this doctrine and discipline?'
> 'This cannot be, Lord!'
> 'Or can a man who holds this doctrine and discipline to be valuable learn the Lokayata system?'
> 'This cannot be, Lord!'
> 'You are not, O Bhikkhus, to learn the Lokayata system. Whosoever does so, shall be guilty of *dukkata* (a form of offence for the monk)'.
> Now at that time the Chabbaggiya Bhikkhus taught the Lokayata system.
> People murmured, etc., saying, 'Like those still enjoying the pleasures of the world !'

105 *Ib.* 106 619. 107 SBE xx. 151-2.

They told this matter to the Blessed One.
'You are not, O Bhikkhus, to teach the Lokayata system. Whosoever does so, shall be guilty of *dukkata*.'
(Similar paragraphs to the last, ending —)
'You are not, O Bhikkhus, to learn—to teach,— the *low arts* (of divination, spells, omens, astrology, sacrifices to gods, witchcraft, and quackery.).'

It is to be noted that Lokayata was mentioned as one of these 'low arts,' by which were meant divination, spells, omens, etc. The Pali words used were *tiracchana vigga,* meaning literally 'brutish or beastly wisdom.' Obviously, the Buddhists had contempt for these. But that is not the point at discussion. The point, rather, is that Lokayata, as known to them, was definitely associated with some kind of ritual and spell. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg[108] have pointed out that the same list of the seven low arts, occurred in *Maha Sila,* and, as in the passage of *Cullavagga* quoted above, Lokayata was mentioned there as one of them. The connection between Lokayata and rituals is thus clear.

It is probably from this point of view that we may understand the meaning of what Kumarila Bhatta, who represented one school of the Mimamsa philosophy, said against the alternative representation of the same philosophy by Prabhakara and his followers. Kumarila[109] said:

For in practice the Mimamsa has been for the most part converted into a Lokayata system; but I have made this effort to bring it into a theistic path.

It is customary to interpret this as follows: The Prabhakara school left no place for God in the Mimamsa philosophy; Kumarila restored the position of God in it and thus made it theistic. As Muir[110] said,

I learn from Professor Banerjea that the Mimamsaka commentator Prabhakara and his school treat the Purva Mimamsa as an atheistic system, while Kumarila makes it out to be theistic.

This may be true; but this may not be the whole of truth. Did Kumarila mean by the above that Mimamsa philosophy, as interpreted by the Prabhakara School, was practically reduced to the Lokayata simply because it left no place for God in it? That would equate Lokayata with Godlessness. But the Mimamsa philosophy was essentially a rationalisation of rituals. Mimamsa minus God,—that is Mimamsa as interpreted by the

108 *Ib.* xx. 152 n. 109 *Varttika* 10. 110 OST iii. 95.

Prabhakara school, could only have been the rationalisation of God-less rituals. And this, according to Kumarila, was reducing the Mimamsa practically into the Lokayata. Thus, according to the indications of Kumarila, too, there were rituals associated with Lokayata, though such rituals were God-less and essentially this-worldly.

If all these be true, then, in spite of its rejection of the authority of *sruti* and *smriti* and in spite of its denial of God, the other-world and the efficacy of the Brahmanical rituals, the Lokayata could have hardly been the philosophy of scepticism and materialism in our usual sense, that is in the sense of being propounded by some individual philosophers. Rather, the clash between Brahmanism and the Lokayata assumes for us the appearance of a clash of two distinct cultures, the latter being deeply rooted in the lives of the masses. It is possibly from this point of view that we may understand the claim of Belvalkar and Ranade that the Lokayata enjoyed 'extensive vogue and seductive charm' in this country. It is from this point of view again that we may also understand the obvious implication of *lokesu ayata,* being prevalent among the masses, an implication which lies at the root of the name itself. On the other hand, if we reject this point of view, we shall be led to the absurd idea that the Indian masses, for inscrutable reasons, were deeply and fundamentally influenced by the views of certain individual philosophers who were sceptics, sophists, atheists and materialists in the modern senses of these terms.

12. Lokayata and the Asura-View

But the problem is, how can we arrive at an idea of the world-outlook of the Lokayatikas, using the word *lokayata* in the broader sense in which we have proposed to understand it? Left, as we are, only with the version of their opponents, we may try the procedure of beginning with an analysis of certain Brahmanical myths propagated against the Lokayatikas.

According to the *Mahabharata,* the Carvaka killed by the holy Brahmanas was originally only a *raksasa,* a demon. He acquired tremendous strength by severe penances; he then started tormenting and subduing the *devas,* the gods. This myth is typical; because the Brahmanical sources were persistently ascribing the Lokayata-views to the peoples described as demons and monsters—the *raksasas, daityas* and *asuras.*

The *Visnu Purana*,[111] after describing how the Great Deceiver (*Mayamoha*), seduced the Daityas to the acceptance of the two heretical views, namely the Buddhist and the Jaina ones, proceeded to explain the genesis of the Lokayata-views thus:

The Great Deceiver, practising illusion, next beguiled other Daityas by means of many other sorts of heresy. In a very short time these Asuras (Daityas), deluded by the Deceiver, abandoned the entire system founded on the ordinances of the triple *Veda*. Some reviled the *Vedas*, others the gods, others the ceremonial of sacrifice and others the Brahmanas: This (they exclaimed), is a doctrine which will not bear discussion; the slaughter (of animals in sacrifice) is not conducive to religious merit. (To say that) oblations of butter consumed in the fire produce any future reward, is the assertion of a child. If Indra, after having attained to godhead by numerous sacrifices,—feeds upon *sami* and other woods, then an animal which eats leaves is superior to him. If it be a fact that a beast slain in sacrifice is exalted to heaven, why does not the worshipper slaughter his own father? If a man is really satiated by the food which another person eats, then *sraddhas* should be offered to people who are travelling abroad, and they, trusting to this, should have no need to carry any food along with them... Infallible utterances do not, great Asuras, fall from the skies; it is only assertions founded on reasoning that are accepted by me and by other (intelligent) persons like yourselves. Thus by numerous methods, the Daityas were unsettled by the great Deceiver, so that none of them any longer regarded the triple *Veda* with favour. When the Daityas had entered on this path of error, then *Devas* (gods) mustered all their energies, and approached to battle. Then followed a combat between the gods and the Asuras, and the latter, who had abandoned the right road, were smitten by the former. In previous times they had been defended by the armour of righteousness which they bore, but when that had been destroyed they also perished.

Muir[112] has already convincingly argued that the view described here could only have been the Lokayata-view. It is to be noted, further, that the *Maitrayani Upanisad*,[113] too, mentioned practically the same myth concerning the origin of the devilish, false and the un-Vedic views of the Lokayatikas.

Verily, Brihaspati (the teacher of the gods) became Sukra (the teacher of the Asuras), and for the security of Indra created this ignorance (*avidya*) for the destruction of the Asura (devils). By this (ignorance) men declare that the inauspicious is auspicious, and that the auspicious is inauspicious. They say that there should be attention to law (*dharma*) which is destructive of the *Veda* and of other Scriptures (*sastra*). Hence, one should not attend to this (teaching). It is false. It is like a barren woman. Mere pleasure is the fruit thereof as also of one who deviates from the proper course. It should not be entered upon.

In the *Gita*,[114] Krisna said,

[111] iii. 18. 14-26. (tr. Muir) [112] JRAS xix. 302.
[113] vii. 9. (tr. Hume). [114] xvi. 6.

Two races were created in this world,—the *devas* (gods) and the *asuras*. O Arjuna, I have already described for you the views of the devas (gods). Listen, now, to the views of the *asuras*.

By the views of the *devas* was obviously indicated the philosophical essence of the *Gita*. But what was meant by the views of the *asuras?* Sridharasvami, by far the ablest of the commentators on the *Gita,* said that the views ascribed by the *Gita* to the *asuras* was nothing but the Lokayata-views. We have, thus, here the same myth, namely, that the Lokayata-views were the views of the demons and the monsters.

Such myths were of course meant to be scare-crows,—to frighten people away from the Lokayata-views. Obviously, the myths could not have been true in the form in which these were presented. Nevertheless, these might have contained an element of important truth. The Lokayata-views, in all presumption, were the views of those people that were despised as *daityas* and *asuras* in the Brahmanical sources. But who were these people? We shall presently see that this question is a complex one and we cannot expect a simple answer to it. But there is no doubt that at least in a great many places the words referred to those people who were considered by the inheritors of the Vedic tradition to be their aliens and that such aliens enjoyed a culture basically different from the so-called Brahmanical one.

But what exactly was the view of the *asuras*? How far was it this-worldly and yet associated with rituals and spells?

13. Asura-View and the Ancient Deha-vada

Dasgupta[115] has already drawn our attention to the possibility of reconstructing the ancient Lokayata by using the view attributed to the *asuras* as the clue. According to him the *asuras* were the ancient Sumerians. Hence he thought that the Lokayata views came from ancient Sumeria. This, as we shall see, is a doubtful speculation; the identification of the *asuras* with the ancient Sumerians is at best one among many possible hypotheses. Nevertheless, his basic suggestion is an important one, for the ancient Brahmanical sources were constantly attributing the Lokayata-views to the *asuras*.

Leaving, therefore, for the time being, the question of the identity of the *asuras*, we may examine certain evidences concerning the views attributed to them. We shall confine ourselves

[115] HIP iii. 528 ff.

mainly to two points of the *asura*-views, namely, the doctrine of the self and the doctrine of the origin of the universe.

The doctrine of the self first.

The *Maitrayani Upanisad*[116] told the following story:

Verily, the gods and the devils (*asuras*), being desirous of the self (*atman*), came into the presence of Brahma. They did obeisance to him and said: 'Sir, we are desirous of the self (*atman*). So, do you tell us.'
Then, meditating long, he thought to himself:
'Verily, these devils are desirous of a self (*atman*) different (from the true one).'
Therefore a very different doctrine was told to them.
Upon that fools here live their life with intense attachment, destroying the saving raft and praising what is false. They see the false as if it were true, as in jugglery.

Hence, what is set forth in the *Vedas*—that is true! Upon what is told in the *Vedas*—upon that wise men live their life. Therefore, a Brahmana should not study what is non-Vedic. This should be the purpose.

Whether the view of the self (*atman*) subscribed to by the *asuras* was preached to them deliberately to delude them away from truth, is of course a doubtful point. However, there is no doubt that the author of the *Upanisad* wanted to single out the doctrine of the self (*atman*) as the most prominent feature of the *asura*-views.

But what was this *asura*-doctrine concerning the self? The *Maitrayani Upanisad* did not give us the answer. However, we find the answer in the *Chandogya Upanisad*, where the same story was repeated in greater details.

We quote below the story of Indra and Virocana, as told in the *Chandogya Upanisad*:[117]

'The Self (*atman*), which is free from evil, ageless, deathless, sorrowless, hungerless, thirstless, whose desire is the Real, whose conception is the Real—He should be searched out, Him one should desire to understand. He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and who understands the Self.'—Thus spake Prajapati.

Then both the gods and the devils (*devas* and *asuras*) heard it. Then they said: 'Come! Let us search out the Self, the Self by searching out whom one obtains all worlds and all desires!'

Then Indra from among the gods went forth unto him, and Virocana from among the devils. Then, without communicating with each other, the two came into the presence of Prajapati, fuel in hand.

Then for thirty-two years the two lived the chaste life of a student of sacred knowledge (*brahmacarya*).

Then Prajapati said to the two: 'Desiring what have you been living?'

Then the two said: 'The Self (*atman*), which is free from evil,

[116] vii. 10 (tr. Hume). [117] viii. 788 (tr. Hume).

ageless, deathless, sorrowless, hungerless, thirstless, whose desire is the Real, whose conception is the Real—He should be searched out, Him one should desire to understand. He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and who understands that Self. — Such do people declare to be your words, Sir. We have been living desiring Him.'

Then Prajapati said to the two: 'That Person who is seen in the eye—He is the Self (*atman*) of whom I spoke. That is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahman.'

'But this one, Sir, who is observed in water and in a mirror—which one is he?'

'The same one, indeed, is observed in all these,' said he.

'Look at yourself in a pan of water. Anything that you do not understand of the Self, tell me.'

Then the two looked in a pan of water.

Then Prajapati said to the two: 'What do you see?'

Then the two said: 'We see everything here, Sir, a Self corresponding exactly, even to the hair and fingernails!'

Then Prajapati said to the two: 'Make yourselves well ornamented, well-dressed, adorned, and look in a pan of water!'

Then the two made themselves well-ornamented, well-dressed, adorned, and looked in a pan of water.

Then Prajapati said to the two: 'What do you see?'

Then the two said: 'Just as we ourselves are here, Sir, well-ornamented, well-dressed, adorned—so there, Sir, well-ornamented, well-dressed, adorned.'

'That is the Self,' said he. 'That is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahman.'

Then with tranquil heart (*santa hridaya*) the two went forth.

Then Prajapati glanced after them, and said: 'They go without having comprehended, without having found the Self (*atman*). Whosoever shall have such a doctrine (*upanisad*), be they gods or be they devils, they shall perish.'

Then with tranquil heart Virocana came to the devils. To them he then declared this doctrine (*upanisad*): 'Oneself (*atman*) is to be made happy here on earth. Oneself is to be waited upon. He who makes his own Self (*atman*) happy here on earth, who waits upon himself—he obtains both worlds, both this world and the yonder.'

Therefore even now here on earth they say of one who is not a giver, who is not a believer (*a-sraddadhana*), who is not a sacrificer.... for such is the doctrine (*upanisad*) of the devils. They adorn the body (*sarira*) of one deceased with what they have begged, with dress, with ornament, as they call it, for they think that thereby they will win yonder world.

After this, the *Upanisad* went on to describe how Indra, the representative of the *devas* or the gods, found the real danger in sticking to such a view of the Self and how he returned to Prajapati in order to be led gradually to an idealistic understanding of the nature of the true Self. This part of the story interests us only in so far as it shows what the *asura*-views were not. For Virocana, along with the *asuras*, whose representative he was, was said to have remained satisfied with the understanding of the Self as identical with the body.

The reference to the yonder-world as forming part of the *asura*-belief is, of course, peculiar, and, at least apparently, it is inconsistent with the view that there is no Self over and above the body. It might have been only a matter of using set formulae rather carelessly. In any case, there can be no doubt that such a belief could not have formed part of the Lokayata-views, for all the available evidences concerning the Lokayata are definitely against it. However, with this reservation, we are obliged to accept Dasgupta's suggestion that the view equating the Self with the body attributed by the *Upanisad* to the *asuras* could only be the Lokayata-view. The evidence for this is not merely that the Brahmanical myths were persistently attributing the Lokayata-views to the *asuras*. Further, this doctrine of there being no Self over and above the body was the main point on which the rival philosophers concentrated their attacks on Lokayata. The writings of Samkaracarya may be taken as a typical example.

In his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, Samkara mentioned the Lokayata-views thrice and invariably as the doctrine of there being no Self over and above the body.

Unlearned people and the Lokayatikas are of opinion that the mere body endowed with the quality of intelligence is the Self.[118]

For this very reason, viz: that intelligence is observed only where a body is observed while it is never seen without a body, the Materialists (Lokayatikas) consider intelligence to be a mere attribute of the body.[119]

Here now some Materialists (Lokayatikas) who see the Self in the body only, are of opinion that a Self separate from the body does not exist; assume that consciousness (*caitanya*), although not observed in earth and other external elements—either single or combined—may yet appear in them when transformed into the shape of a body, so that consciousness springs from them; and thus maintain that knowledge is analogous to intoxicating quality (which arises when certain materials are mixed in certain proportions), and that man is only a body qualified by consciousness. There is, thus, according to them no Self separate from the body and capable of going to the heavenly world or obtaining release, through which consciousness is in the body; but the body alone is what is conscious, is the Self. For this assertion they allege the reason stated in the *sutra*, 'On account of its existence where a body is.' For wherever something exists if some other thing exists, and does not exist if that other thing does not exist, we determine the former thing to be a mere quality of the latter; light and heat, e.g. we determine to be qualities of fire. And as life, movement, consciousness, remembrance and so on—which by

118 on *Br Su* i. 1. 1. 119 SBE xxxiv. 368.

the upholders of an independent Self are considered qualities of the Self—are observed only within bodies and not outside bodies, and as an abode of those qualities, different from the body, cannot be proved, it follows that they must be qualities of the body only. The Self therefore is not different from the body.[120]

Thus, we have here a view identifying the Self with the body and clearly referred to as the Lokayata-view. It is to be noted that Samkara did not mention, nor did he care to refute, any other contention of the Lokayatikas; this implies that this was considered by him to be the most important among the Lokayata-tenets.

Such a view of the Self was, moreover, very ancient; it was in fact older than the *Brahma Sutra,* on which Samkara commented. We find the same, or at least a very similar, view referred to by the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad* and also by the early Buddhist literatures.

In the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad,*[121] Yajnavalkya said to Maitreyi:

Arising out of these elements (*bhuta*), into them also one vanishes away. After death there is no consciousness (*na pretya samjna asti*).

The same thing is repeated in another place of the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad*[122] and presumably a view like this was referred to by Yama in the *Katha Upanisad.*[123] Maitreyi, in the *Brihad-Aranyaka,* was naturally bewildered to listen to such a view of the Self from Yajnavalkya. But it was obviously not his own view; it was the position of the opponent which he was contesting. Therefore, it could have been the view of the ancient Lokayatikas. Dasgupta[124] has already shown that this was the way in which Jayanta was wanting to look at the Upanisadic passage:

Jayanta says in his *Nyaya Manjari* that the Lokayata system was based on views expressed in passages like the above, which represent only the opponent's (*purva-paksa*) view.

Referring to this view of the Self, Rhys Davids[125] said:

A very similar, if not indeed the very same view is also controverted in the *Brahmajala Sutta,* and is constantly referred to throughout the *Pitakas* under the stock phrase *tam jivam tam sariram.*

[120] *Ib.* xxxviii. 269. [121] ii. 4. 12 (tr. Hume). [122] iv. 5. 13.
[123] ii. 6. [124] HIP iii. 519. [125] DB i. 167

As translated by Rhys Davids, the passage is as follows:

> In the first place, brethren, some recluse or Brahmana puts forth the following opinion, the following view:
>
> 'Since, Sir, this soul has form, is built up of the four elements, and is the offspring of father and mother, it is cut off, destroyed, on the dissolution of the body; and does not continue after death; and then, Sir, the soul is completely annihilated....'[126]

If such a view, as Rhys Davids said, was 'constantly referred to throughout the *Pitakas*,' then we are obliged at least to admit that a view like this must have been widely prevalent in Buddhist India. Moreover, as Rhys Davids[127] has himself shown, that the names Lokayata and Lokayatikas occurred frequently in the early Buddhist sources. Under these circumstances, it is only natural for us to think that the doctrine under discussion, or something very much like it, was an aspect of the original Lokayata. But this is precisely the point which Rhys Davids has strongly doubted. According to him, we come across a view like this in the ancient Buddhist sources; we also come across in these sources the name Lokayata; but nowhere do we come across expressed connection between the two. Therefore, we cannot infer any such connection. Of course Samkara refuted a similar doctrine, and he called it Lokayata. This, according to Rhys Davids, was possibly an error.

> Samkara, in setting forth his theory of the soul, controverts a curious opinion which he ascribes to Lokayatikas—possibly wrongly, as the very same opinion was controverted ages before in the *Pitakas*, and not there called Lokayata, though the word was used in *Pitaka* times.[128]

We naturally hesitate to agree with Rhys Davids on this point. The evidence of what is clear cannot be set aside by the evidence of what is obscure. What is clear is that a kind of *deha-vada* was repeatedly referred to by the early Buddhist sources. Secondly, a doctrine called the Lokayata was frequently mentioned by the same sources. Thirdly, Samkara, though he came long after the early Buddhists, identified the two and wanted to refute specifically this *deha-vada* as the doctrine of the Lokayatikas. What is obscure, however, is why these early Buddhist sources did not mention the *deha-vada* together with the name Lokayata and expressedly identify the two. But the absence of any expressed identification cannot be the same as a positive denial of it, particularly in the face of the

[126] *Ib.* i. 46. [127] *Ib.* i. 172. [128] *Ib.* i. 171-2.

evidence provided by the writings of Samkara. The contention of Rhys Davids would have been acceptable if it were possible to find a name other than the Lokayata used by the Buddhist sources to designate the *deha-vada* under discussion, or, in the alternative, to find some doctrine other than the *deha-vada* being definitely referred to by these sources under the designation of Lokayata. But none of these possibilities are there. To agree with Rhys Davids it would be necessary to assume that though this *deha-vada* had an extensive vogue in Buddhist India, it had no distinct name assigned to it, or, at least the Buddhist writers never felt the need of mentioning its name. It would be necessary to assume, further, that there was a widely prevelant doctrine called the Lokayata, but the Buddhist writers never felt the need of describing it. Such assumptions would be extravagant. Besides, it would be necessary to assume that Samkara was deliberately falsifying the position of the Lokayatikas by attributing to them a *deha-vada* in which they themselves did not believe. The time-gap separating Samkara from the early Buddhists might have been a long one; but there is nothing to disprove the possibility that Samkara was only dwelling on a point tradition handed down to him from a remote past, probably from the days of the *Brihad-Aranyaka* and the *Chandogya Upanisads*.

14. Asura Cosmogony

This *deha-vada* of the *Upanisads* and the *Pitakas* could have been genuinely Lokayatika. But it could not have been the *deha-vada* of Madhava's description, because, as we have already seen, Lokayata was also characterised by its distinctive spells and rituals. In order to understand the Lokayata standpoint, therefore, it is necessary to raise a new question. Do we come across in the cultural history of ancient India any *deha-vada* which was at the same time characterised by its distinctive spells and rituals? As a matter of fact we do. It was the *deha-vada* of those obscure beliefs and practices that are broadly referred to as Tantrism.

Tantrism was very old; competent scholars[129] have conjectured that it could have been even older than the *Vedas*.

Tantrism, with all its spells and rituals, was distinctly

[129] Dasgupta ORC 27.

non-Vedic and, at least in its early phase, opposed to the Vedic tradition. As Kulluka Bhatta,[130] the commentator on Manu put it, '*srutis are* two-fold, the Vedic and the Tantrik.'

Tantrism, was in a sense, *lokesu ayatah,* prevalent among the people. As a modern scholar[131] has put it, 'In the popular knowledge and belief they (*Tantras*) have practically superceded the *Vedas* over a large part of India.'

And this Tantrism was, in a very important sense, the extreme form of *deha-vada. Deha,* that is, the material human body, as conceived by Tantrism, was a microcosm of the universe itself.[132]

We shall return later to discuss in greater details all these aspects of Tantrism. For the present let us see how far this clue, namely, that the *deha-vada* of the ancient Lokayatikas could have been the same as the *deha-vada* of Tantrism, may help us further to reconstruct the ancient Lokayata.

We have already seen that the *asura*-view referred to in the *Gita* was equated by Sridhara to the Lokayata-view. We do not have any strong reason to question Sridhara's authority particularly because sources as old as the *Chandogya Upanisad,* the *Maitrayani Upanisad* and the *Visnu Purana* persistently attributed the Lokayata-views to the *asuras.* We may, therefore, look more closely into the *Gita* to see whether any more positive information about the *asura*-view is found in it.

Much of what the *Gita* said about the *asuras* and their views was of course an expression of sheer contempt: the *asuras* could not differentiate between desire and self-restraint; they had no notion of purity, morality and truth; and so on.[133] However, it is possible for us to recover at least two interesting indications about the *asura*-view from this heap of abuses and slanders. The first implied that the *asuras* had a definite cosmogony and the second that they had distinct forms of ritual practices.

The *Gita* summed up the cosmogony of the *asuras,* thus: *aparaspara sambhutam kim anyat kama haitukam.*[134] The world originated from the union of the male and the female and that it could not have any other cause than *kama* or the sexual urge. Secondly, according to the *Gita,* these same *asuras,* in spite of their denial of God and the next world[135] had some distinct forms of ritual practices of their own[136]: 'the *yajna* (ritual) they

130 on *Manu* ii. 1. 131 ERE xii. 193. 132 Dasgupta ORC 31.
133 xvi. 7 ff. 134 xvi. 8. 135 *Ib.* 136 xvi. 17.

perform is *yajna* only in name.'[137] So they were performing some kind of *yajna* after all, though naturally, these rituals were considered to be as bad as no rituals by those that despised them.

So the *asuras* of the *Gita* had a distinct cosmogony, and, in spite of their essential this-worldliness and the denial of God, they were practising some kind of rituals of their own. Accepting, therefore, the suggestion of Sridhara that these *asuras* were but the Lokayatikas, we may try to identify the ancient Lokayata on the basis of these two clues. The question is: do we come across in the ancient Indian tradition the same or similar cosmogony accompanied by some form of non-Vedic or non-Brahmanical ritual practices? The answer is in the affirmative. The suggestion, again, is that we are to look at the Tantra to find it.

Following is a free rendering into English of how one of the ablest of our recent writers[138] on Tantrism has explained its cosmogony:

> In the case of the human beings the process which leads to the creation of a new life is the union of the male with the female. The universe was created in the same way, through the union of the *purusa* (the male) with the *prakriti* (the female).... That which was the great original throbbing in the vast empty sky manifests itself in the human beings in the form of erotic urge (*kama*), the working of the Eros (Madana). Exactly in the manner in which the erotic urge (*kama*) and Madana lead, in the case of the human beings, to new names and new forms, the great throbbing caused by the erotic urge and Madana in the primordial *purusa* and *prakriti* caused new names and new forms throughout the universe... In certain *Tantras* the similarity between and, in fact, the sameness of the union of Siva (*purusa*, the male) and Sakti (*prakriti*, the female) on the one hand, and that of the human male and the human female, on the other, is explained in meticulous details,—the former accounting for the birth of the universe while the latter accounting for the birth of human beings.

Thus, the *asura-cosmogony*, by which Sridhara meant the Lokayata-cosmogony, was the same as the cosmogony of the *Tantras*.[139] We have already seen that the Lokayata *deha-vada* could have been the same as the Tantrika one. The two suggestions converge. Lokayata and Tantrism were probably the same. This may also explain the references to the Lokayata-rituals found in the ancient Buddhist texts as well as the *asura*-rituals referred to by the *Gita*.

137 xvi. 17.

138 Bandopadhyaya *R* (B) ii. 294-5.

139 Cf. Thomson SAGS ii. 91 for similar cosmogony elsewhere.

15. Lokayata and Tantra

The following is taken from Dasgupta:[140]

> Gunaratna, however, in his commentary on the *Sat Darsana Samuccaya,* speaks of the Carvaks as being a nihilistic sect who only eat but do not regard the existence of virtue and vice and do not trust anything else but what can be directly perceived. They drank wines and ate meat and were given to unrestricted sex-indulgence. Each year they gathered together on a particular day and had unrestricted intercourse with women. They behaved like common people and for this reason they were called *lokayata.*

The promiscuity of the Lokayatikas referred to by Gunaratna suggests an interesting point. It could not have been a mere mark of moral depravity; for the depraved do not have to assign a special day of the year for such orgies. Therefore, the promiscuity had a ritual significance. And if the promiscuity was a ritual, so must have been the practice of eating meat and drinking wine. We have, thus, in Gunaratna's writings at least three *ma-s* of the Tantrikas. As is well known, the five-fold ritual of the Tantrikas is called *panca makara* or the five *ma*-s because the words for these practices begin with the letter *ma.* These are: *madya* (wine), *mamsa* (meat) *maithuna* (sexual intercourse), *mudra* (fried cereals), *matsya* (fish). The first three being most important in the list, the only way in which we can understand Gunaratna's statement is that he wanted to identify the Tantra with the Lokayata.

Gunaratna's statement, therefore, to say the least, was very remarkable. What is no less remarkable, however, is Dasgupta's indifference to its significance. The only observation he found it necessary to make on Gunaratna's words was concerning the uncertainty of the name Carvaka:

> Thus it is difficult to say whether the word Carvaka was the name of a real personage or a mere allusive term applied to the adherents of the *lokayata* view.[141]

Obviously, Gunaratna's observations suggest more problems than this. We may begin with what Gunaratna[142] actually said:

> After this—the Lokayata-view. The nature of the *nastikas* first. The Kapalikas, who smear their bodies with ashes and who are Yogins, are some of them, degenerate Brahmanas. They do not recognise virtue (*punya*) and vice (*papa*) of the creatures. They say that the world is made up of four elements. Some of them, the Carvakas and others, consider *akasa* (empty space) to be the fifth element; they view the world as made of five elements. According to

[140] HIP iii. 533. [141] *Ib.* [142] *TRD* 300.

them, consciousness emerges in these elements in the manner of the intoxicating power. Living beings are like bubbles in water. Man is nothing but body endowed with consciousness. They drink wine and eat meat and indulge in indiscriminate sexual intercourse, even incest. On a specific day of each year all of them gather together and unite with any woman that they may desire. They do not recognise any *dharma* (religious ideal) over and above *kama* (the erotic urge). They are called the Carvakas, the Lokayatikas, etc. To drink and to chew is their motto; they are called Carvakas because they chew (*carv*), that is, eat without discrimination. They consider virtue and vice to be merely qualities attributed to the objects.... They are also called Lokayatas or Lokayatikas because they behave like the ordinary undiscerning masses. They are also called Barhaspatyas, because their doctrine was originally propounded by Brihaspati.

Gunaratna took care to mention here all the alternative names traditionally attributed to the Lokayatikas. These were the Carvakas and the Barhaspatyas. We are thus left with no doubt as to who he was speaking about. At the same time he said that these Lokayatikas were Kapalikas; they were Yogins and they smeared their bodies with ashes. We know that the Kapalikas are Tantrikas[143] and Tantrism is a form of Yogic practice in which the act of smearing the body with ashes plays a prominent part. It is in this context that the three important *ma*-s of Tantric practice, namely *madya, mamsa* and *maithuna*, mentioned by Gunaratna, are to be understood. The identity of the Lokayatikas with the Tantrikas could not have been more complete, though the materialistic view mentioned here by Gunaratna does not fit in with our usual notion about Tantrism. But, as we shall fully discuss later, this is largely because of the fact that our usual notion of Tantrism is in need of serious revision. Tantrism, in its origin and essence, was not what we commonly think it to have been. In so far as it had any philosophical basis at all, Tantrism was materialistic, or better, proto-materialistic, that is, a kind of primitive materialism wrapped in archaic phantasies. The *deha-vada* as well as the peculiar cosmogony of Tantrism already referred to are examples of this. This proto-materialism was obviously far from our modern conception of the materialistic philosophy. Yet it is important to note that the original Tantrism represented a phase of human thought which was yet to be acquainted with the spiritualistic values. There is no doubt that we come across all sorts of spiritualistic ideas in the written treatises on the Tantra. But, as it

[143] Dasgupta ORC 105 n.: '*Kapali* is the general name given to the Tantric Yogins.'

is rightly said,[144] it is difficult to find out the real tenets of Tantrism from the written treatises that are available for us. The reason is that persistent efforts were made in these treatises to bring Tantrism on theistic lines and spiritualistic ideas were continually superimposed on it. This resulted in the so-called schools of Tantrism,–the Buddhistic Tantrism and the Hindu Tantrism, the latter subdivided again into Vaisnava Tantrism and Sakta Tantrism. Tantrism, however, was much older than all these–older in fact than the origin of the spiritualistic ideas in general. But more of this later. For the present let us confine ourselves to the evidence of Gunaratna.

H. P. Sastri, thanks to his greater objectivity, did not overlook or ignore the suggestion of Gunaratna. 'Gunaratna,' he said,[145] 'identifies the Kapalikas with the Lokayatikas.' He has, moreover, drawn our attention to certain other indications which pointed to the same identification. One of these, according to him, is to be found in the *Brihaspati Sutra* edited by Thomas. We find in this text two successive aphorisms, the first referring to the Lokayatikas and the second to the Kapalikas, and these two aphorisms were, according to Sastri, quite genuine in spite of the fact that the text itself, in the form in which it has come down to us, is largely spurious. These are:

> Universally Lokayata is to be followed at the time of acquiring material prosperity (*arthasadhana-kale*). 11. 5.
>
> Only the Kapalika as regards the erotic practices (*kamasadhane*). 11. 6.

Referring to this, Sastri[146] wrote:

> But the most important piece of information the *Brihaspati Sutra* gives us is the close connection of the Lokayatas with the Kapalikas. He (i.e., Brihaspati, the supposed author of the really genuine portions of the text) says, for the production of wealth Lokayata is the *sastra;* at the same breath he says, for *kama* or earthly enjoyment (more literally, erotic practices) Kapalika is the *sastra.* If Brihaspati says so, he is sure to be denounced by the orthodox people as a *nastika.* But this is not our present purpose—our present purpose is the Kapalikas.... But the *Brihaspati Sutra* tell us that the Kapalikas are an ancient sect, at least as ancient as the Lokayatas and that as the Lokayatas, with their Materialistic Philosophy made the beginning of the science of Economics, so the Kapalikas, with what system of philosophy we do not know, made the beginning of the science of Erotics.

The last point in the above observation is not clear. Brihaspati suggested that the Lokayatikas were closely related to the

144 Bandopadhyaya *R* (B) ii. 274.
145 L 6. 146 *Ib.* 5-6.

Kapalikas. Gunaratna went a step further and identified the two. Sastri has taken both the authorities seriously. However, if we really do so, there is obviously no need to imagine any philosophy other than the materialistic one to form the basis of the *kama sadhana* of the Kapalikas. Further, it follows from the premise of Sastri himself that the so-called science of erotics of the Kapalikas was vitally related to the ideal of *artha sadhana* or the enhancement of material wealth. We are going to argue that this was actually so, for the Tantrika cults like the Kapalika had their source in the archaic belief according to which natural production could be enhanced by the imitation or contagion of human reproduction, that is the *kama sadhana* and *artha sadhana* were not so unrelated after all.

16. Asuras

Further data concerning the *asura-views* appear to corroborate the point, that by the Lokayatikas were probably meant the Tantrikas. Before, however, we pass on to discuss this, it is necessary to examine the observations made in this connection by Dasgupta; because the possibility of reconstructing the lost Lokayata on the basis of an analysis of the views attributed to the *asuras* was originally suggested by him.

His crucial evidence had been the passage in the *Chandogya Upanisad*, which, as we have seen, attributed a kind of *deha-vada* to the *asuras*. The *Upanisad* also mentioned the burial mode of the *asuras* and Dasgupta has argued that the *deha-vada* of the Asuras had been 'a corollary underlying their custom of adorning the dead.'[147] On the basis of this he concluded that the Lokayata-views had their origin in ancient Sumeria.

Two major assumptions are involved in this. First, the asuras meant only the ancient Sumerians. Secondly, the burial custom was characteristic only of them. For, if the *deha-vada* was a corollary to the burial custom and if other people had the same or similar burial custom, they, too, were likely to have developed the same or similar *deha-vada* and this would have gone against Dasgupta's conjecture.

However, on closer examination, we find both the assump-

[147] HIP iii. 530.

tions to be highly doubtful. We shall begin with the second assumption.

To begin with, the *Upanisad* did not really say that the *deha-vada* of the *asuras* was a corollary to their burial custom. Rather, the text itself gives us the simple impression that the *asuras* believed in the said *deha-vada* and they also practised the particular mode of burial. Secondly, this burial custom, far from being characteristic only of the Sumerians, was hardly the only mode of burial known to them. As it is well known, the ancient Egyptians carried the practice of adorning the dead to extreme excess and many other peoples of the ancient world had the same or a similar practice. Even many of the tribes surviving in India have a similar burial custom.[148] So the burial custom of the *asuras* mentioned by the *Upanisad* could not have been distinctive of the ancient Sumerians. Besides, it is not true that this was the only mode of disposing of the dead known to the ancient Sumerians.

> Cremation appears to have been the rule in certain parts of ancient Sumer and Akkad, as in the region South of Lagash; but in other parts interment in coffins and vaults is more frequent.[149]

Thus, Dasgupta's assumption that the Lokayata *deha-vada* was originally a corollary to the belief underlying the Sumerian custom of adorning the dead cannot be readily accepted.

But what was meant by the *asura*? Could it be that the *asuras* of ancient Indian literature were none else than the ancient Sumerians? Such an assumption would justify Dasgupta's conclusion. But all the scholars would not agree to it and certain evidences definitely do not justify the assumption.

There have been many conjectures about the ancient *asuras*, including of course the one on which Dasgupta's thesis is based.

> Banerji-Sastri considers the *asuras* as immigrants from Assyria, the followers of the *asura* cult who preceded the Aryans in India and were the authors of the Indus Valley civilization. Bhandarkar takes the *asuras* to be the Assurs or Assyrians and suggests that the *Satapatha Brahmana* refers to the *asura* settlements in Magadha or South Bihar.[150]

Others thought that they were the ancient Persians, the followers of Ahura Mazda.

[148] ERE iv. 411 ff. [149] *Ib.* iv. 444.
[150] Majumdar (ed.) VA 250.

Christensen has suggested that the *asura*-religion was practised by the more cultured and steadier elements of the primitive Indo-Iranian society whose chief occupation was agriculture and cattle-breeding, while the older *daiva*-religion continued to find favour with the more vigorous but less civilized portions of the people to whom the primitive predatory habits were more congenial: the former were content to remain behind in Iran, but the latter, urged by the spirit of adventure, advanced farther east and at last entered India.[151]

B. K. Ghosh[152] has argued that though eventually the Indo-Aryan society became predominantly *daivic*, and this as contrasted with the Indo-Iranian society which remained predominantly *asuric*, yet the term 'asura' was 'perhaps borrowed from a higher civilization.'

As I have suggested elsewhere (*Indian Culture* viii. 339), this term is probably nothing but the personal designation of the tutelary deity of Assyria used as a generic name by the Indo-Iranians who must have come in direct or indirect contact with the Assyrians during the period of Kassite ascendancy.[153]

The *asura*-tribe still surviving in Central India, according to some, could have been the *asuras* of ancient Indian literature:

....the Aryans, in their invasion of what is now called India, were obstructed by that fierce and savage-like people whom they called *asura*, or demons, and whom they expelled and partly annihilated. Whether the *asuras* living in Chota Nagpur are the offspring of these opponents of the Aryans or are connected with the *asura* builders of those ancient embankments still found in the Mirzapur district, is, of course, an open question; yet there seems to be nothing to exclude such suppositions.[154]

Others, who would not agree to this possible identity of the *asuras* with the ancestors of the surviving *asura*-tribes, would look at the ancient Asuras as a general term referring to the original inhabitants of India who resisted the Aryan advance.

Asuras, daityas, danavas, and *nagas* denoted peoples of different cultures in various stages of civilization ranging from the rude, aboriginal, uncivilsed tribes to the semi-civilised races, offering strong resistance to the spread of Aryan culture. There appear to have been three stages in the description of the hostile tribes of *asuras, danavas, daityas,* and *raksasas* in Puranic accounts. Originally, these denoted human beings, but as they were generally the enemies of Aryans, these names came to mean alien and hated, hostile or savage men. Later on, these names became terms of opprobrium and abuse which led to the attribution of evil characters to these peoples.... Finally, these terms came to be associated with demoniac beings and were used synonymously with demons.[155]

151 *Ib.* 220. 152 *Ib.* 218 ff. 153 *Ib.* 223-4.
154 ERE ii. 157. 155 Majumdar (ed.) VA 313.

This diversity of views concerning the *asuras* at least shows that the problem is not a simple one and as such we cannot smoothly identify them with the ancient Sumerians. The point is that the many references we come across in our ancient literatures to the *asuras* are not all of the same nature; this suggests that probably the term was not used in any uniform sense at all.

Among these bewildering multiplicity of references to the *asuras*, it may be useful for our present purpose to concentrate on one type of suggestion that appears to be quite prominent. The suggestion is that at least in a large number of cases the word *asuras* referred to the builders of the Indus civilisation.

17. Indus Archaeology

'On the top of Mount Meru,' said Sayana,[156] 'lies the city of Amaravati, wherein the gods dwell; and beneath Meru lies Iravati, the city of the *asuras*.' It may be difficult to trace the tradition upon which Sayana was dwelling here; but the connection of the *asuras* with Iravati, as suggested by Sayana, cannot be looked upon lightly. For the archaeologist's spade has really unearthed the ruins of an ancient city by the bank of Iravati, which, on the evidence of the *Rig Veda*, we are strongly inclined to look as the city of the *asuras*. This city is known to us as Harappa.

The evidences are quite simple.

In the sixth *Mandala* of *Rig Veda* we come across a description of Indra's campaign against the *asuras*. Indra was called there *asuraghna*,[157] the killer of the *asuras*. This description of Indra is not uncommon in the Vedic literatures. The *Atharva Veda*[158] the *Satapatha Brahmana*,[159] the *Grihya Sutras*,[160] and even the *Upanisads*[161] remembered him as the destroyer of the *asuras*.

The word *asuraghna* occurred in *Rig Veda* vi. 22. 4. Its authorship was attributed to the *risi* Bharadwaja. To the same *risi* was attributed a series of other verses of the same *Mandala*, including the *Sukta* vi. 27. Presumably, the role in which Indra was depicted in *Rig Veda* vi. 27 was the same in which he

156 SBE xii. 110 n.
157 vi. 22. 4.
158 SBE xlii. 79, 83, 137, 215, 222.
159 *Ib*. xxvi. 399; xliii. 193.
160 *Ib*. xxix. 342.
161 *Ib*. xv. 343.

was also depicted in vi. 22, though the word *asura* does not explicitly occur in the former.

Now in *Rig Veda* vi. 27 we come across certain interesting proper names. One of these is Varasikha. Indra was described as destroying him along with his descendants. We have just seen that the context suggests that Indra did it in the role of *asuraghna*, that is as the destroyer of the *asuras*. It is from this point of view, therefore, that Sayana[162] was fully justified in explaining Varasikha as the name of a certain *asura*.

This point is important. For if Varasikha and others were but *asuras*, their city was presumably the city of the *asuras*. The name of this city, according to *Rig Veda* was *Hariyupiya*. Scholars[163] today are strongly inclined to identify Hariyupiya of the *Rig Veda* as the Harappa of the Indus Valley: 'Certainly, the written tradition and the archaeological record match very well here.'[164]

Therefore, there are grounds to believe that at least in some cases the word *asura* meant the authors of the Indus Civilization. Banerji-Sastri, as we have seen, thought so; though he conjectured that these authors of the Indus Civilization originally came from Assyria. This last point, however, is yet to be established convincingly by contemporary archaeology.[165]

18. Tantra and Indus Civilization

It has been argued by contemporary archaeologists[166] and historians that the Indus cities were destroyed by the Vedic Aryans and the peoples living therein were looted, massacred and routed. At the present stage of our knowledge we cannot possibly replace this hypothesis by a more satisfactory one. Nevertheless, the orbit of the Indus Civilization was a fairly large one and all the people living therein could not have been completely annihilated; nor could all traces of their ideology, their beliefs and their rituals, have completely vanished from the country.

What happened to all these? Our historians are yet to answer the question fully. However, assuming that the Indus people were called the *asuras* in the earlier portions of *Rig Veda*, it would be only natural to conjecture that their descend-

[162] on *RV* vi. 27. 4.
[163] Wheeler IC 18.
[164] Kosambi ISIH 68.
[165] See Childe MAE & FIMAE.
[166] Wheeler IC 18.

ants continued to be characterised as before, that is, as *asuras*, even in the later Vedic-Brahmanical literatures, and, as such, it may not be totally unreasonable to ask whether the views and rituals attributed to the *asuras* in such comparatively later works as the *Upanisads* and the *Gita* could have been only the relics of those of the Indus period.

Here, again, the evidence of the literary tradition appears to agree with that of the archaeological records. We have already seen that the *asura*-view, as described by the *Gita* in particular, was in all probability the same as Tantrism. On the other hand, it has been argued that we come across very strong traces of Tantrism in the material remains of the Indus Civilization.[167]

We have discussed the grounds for identifying the Lokayata with the *asura*-views. But the Lokayata, whatever it was, was essentially proto-materialistic or this-worldly. Thus is raised a further question: Is there anything in the view attributed to the *asuras* which indicates its this-worldliness? We have already referred to the *deha-vada* and the cosmogony of the *asuras;* we shall now mention another peculiar evidence of the Vedic literatures which indicates that the rituals of the *asuras*, too, were essentially this-worldly. In *Rig Veda*,[168] we read:

> 'O Indra! thou, by the *maya*, has defeated those *mayavins* who were *putting the sacrificial oblations* (*sradha*) *into their own mouths;* thou, who art the protector of men, hast destroyed the cities of Pipru and hast saved *Vijisan* (lit., he who moves on the straight path) from the destruction of the robbers.

Mayavin literally meant the possessors and practitioners of *maya*, magic power or 'craft.'[169] Sayana[170] said that the word here referred to the *asuras*. And there is no doubt that Sayana was right. For *maya* in *Rig Veda*, had been the power characteristic of the *asuras*.[171] Besides, we come across in the Vedic tradition repeated statements to the effect that it was the *asuras* who were putting the sacrificial oblations into their own mouth:

> Once upon a time the gods and the *asuras*, both of them springing from Prajapati, strove together. And the *asuras*, even through arrogance, thinking, 'Unto whom, forsooth, should we make offering?' went on offering into their own mouths.

This occurs in two places of the *Satapatha Brahmana*.[172] Further,

167 Marshall MIC i. 48-51; Prana Nath IHQ vii. 1-52.
168 i. 51. 5. 169 Macdonell VM 26. 170 on *RV* i. 52. 5 .
171 i.11.1; 1.51.5; v.63.7, etc. 172 SBE xli. 1; xliv. 22.

Sayana,[173] in his commentary on *Rig Veda,* quoted the authorities of Vajasaneyi and Kausitakis to establish the same point. Vajasaneyi said that the *devas* and *asuras* once used to look upon each other with arrogance; the *asuras* insolently thought, 'We are not going to offer sacrifices to any,' so they went on putting the sacrificial oblations into their own mouths and thereby insulting (the *devas*). Kausitakis said, the *asuras* defeated Agni and went on offering sacrifices to themselves.

The ritual practice of putting sacrificial oblations into their own mouths sounds highly peculiar. However, the rituals of the Tantrikas are something of that sort: they drink wine and eat meat, whatever might be the significance they attach to such practices. And if we concur with Gunaratna as to the origin of the name Carvaka (*carva,* meaning the act of eating), then the *asuras, who went on offering into their own mouths* may as well be called the Carvakas. In any case, the Vedic evidences at least indicate that the rituals of the *asuras* were not based on the concept of other-worldliness, i.e., these were essentially materialistic.

19. Original Samkhya

The questions concerning the *asura*-view and of Tantrism in the broad sense cannot possibly be fully answered without entering into the more complicated problem of the origin and development of the Samkhya philosophy.

There are, to begin with, certain highly interesting suggestions, the significance of which cannot be lightly treated. As is well known, Kapila was said to have been the founder of the Samkhya sysetm and it is said that he imparted this knowledge first of all to *Asuri*. Thus, according to the *Bhagavata,*[174]

> The fifth *avatara* (incarnation of God) was named Kapila, the chief of saints, who revealed to *Asuri* the Samkhya explanation of first principles, which has been impaired by time.

Of course, Kapila being an incarnation of God sounds somewhat ironical because, as it is well known, the original Samkhya had absolutely no place for God in it. But the imparting of the Samkhya knowledge first of all to *Asuri* might not have been a mere myth. For the same thing was said in the *Samkhya Karika*[175] itself: 'This great purifying (doctrine) the sage com-

[173] on *RV* 1.51.5. [174] i. 12 (tr. Colebrooke *SK* ver.)
[175] 70.

passionately imparted to *Asuri, Asuri* taught it to Pancasikha, by whom it was extensively propagated.'

Now, *Asuri* might have been the name of a particular person, as is usually supposed. There is nothing definite to disprove this supposition. At the same time we should not overlook the circumstance that the name *Asuri* could have been derived from the word *asura*: *asura* adds *sni,* a suffix in the sense of *apatya* or progeny, and forms *Asuri* to mean the son of the *asura.*

This suggestion is significant. In another fairly ancient text, Kapila himself was described as an *asura,* struggling as all the *asuras* did, with the gods. Thus *Baudhayana*[176] said:

With reference to this matter they quote also the following passage —'There was, forsooth, an *Asura,* Kapila by name, son of Prahlada. Striving with the gods, he made these divisions. A wise man should not take heed of them.'

Of course it cannot be conclusively claimed that this same Kapila was the founder of the Samkhya system. But the possibility cannot be conclusively disproved either. Besides, there were points of fundamental importance on which Samkhya agreed with the views attributed to the *asuras.*

We have already seen the cosmogony attributed by the *Gita* to the *asuras*: the world was the effect of the sexual urge and it was born as a result of the union of the male and the female. And Gaudapada,[177] in his commentary on the *Samkhya Karika* mentioned the same cosmogony:

As the birth of a child proceeds from the union of male and female, so the production of creation results from the union of *prakriti* and *purusa.*

It will be objected that the *prakriti* of the Samkhya meant the primordial matter (rather than the female) just as the *purusa* meant the soul (rather than the male). This makes the similarity between the Samkhya cosmogony and the *asura*-cosmogony rather remote. But that is not so. For though *purusa* was eventually understood to mean the soul, this was far from the original meaning of the word. *Purusa* originally meant the male human body and this was the sense in which even the authors of the earlier *Upanisads* understood the word. This point has already been argued by Belvalkar and Ranade. Pointing to the use of the word in the *Brahmanas* and some of the *Upanisads* they said,

This clearly shows that the *purusa* originally denoted the human

176 SBE xiv. 260. 177 on *SK.* 21.

being with its peculiar bodily structure and not any inner or spiriutal entity in dwelling therein. (In the first and second group of our Upanisadic texts, this is almost the exclusive sense in which the term is used).[178]

The point, as we shall fully discuss it later, is that the Samkhya thought which was originally fully atheistic and materialistic, was submitted to a process of rigorous spiritualisation, and idealistic contents were grafted on it in such a manner that at last the original Samkhya passed into its opposite. The transformation of the original concept of the male body into the concept of pure detached consciousness hardly differing from the Vedanta view of the Self was but a part or aspect of this process. Again, it is true that *prakriti* of Samkhya meant the material principle. What is often overlooked, however, is the circumstance that overtly female characteristics were also attributed to the same. As has been ably pointed out by Bhattacaryya,[179] the *prakriti* was compared to the dancing girl and the shy bride. Besides, as we shall see in Chapter VI, the terminologies like *ksetra* and others, by which the *prakriti* was constantly referred to in the Samkhya texts, probably had an overt feminine signifiance. These show that *prakriti* was not merely a material principle but also a female principle. It remains for us to discuss more fully how this female principle could at the same time be understood to mean the primordial matter, from which, according to original Samkhya, resulted the evolution of the world.

To return to the question of Samkhya views. If *prakriti* and *purusa* originally meant the female and the male, as these obviously did, then we have good reasons to think that the cosmogony of original Samkhya did not differ much from the cosmogony attributed by the *Gita* to the *asuras*. But this cosmogony, we have argued, was also the same as that of Tantrism. This raises questions concerning the relation between original Samkhya and original Tantra.

That the fundamental categories of Samkhya and Tantra are the same will not be doubted; these are the *prakriti* and the *purusa*. According to both Samkhya and Tantra, again, *prakriti* is primary insofar at least as the world-process is concerned. There must have, therefore, been some relation between Tantra and Samkhya. However, under the influence of the changed ideas about Samkhya, according to which, this originally materialistic outlook is mistaken for a form of mystical idealism—the

178 HIP ii. 428. 179 *BDS* (B) 149-50.

modern scholars have, on the whole, been reluctant to acknowledge this relationship; for Tantrism, particularly in its ritual aspect, remained largely in its original stage of crude primitivism and this in spite of all the spiritual coatings that were tried on it in later times. Or, when this relationship between Tantra and Samkhya is at all admitted, it is said that Tantrism borrowed its philosophical foundation from the Samkhya system.[180] We shall argue later that this is a gross misconception. For, to all presumption, Samkhya, too, in spite of all the metaphysical modifications eventually introduced into it, had the same humble origin as that of Tantrism. As a matter of fact, Samkhya and Tantra were, in origin, not different from each other. Or, if we are at all bent on attributing chronological priority to any, it belongs to Tantrism. The primordial complex of an archaic world-view and a series of equally archaic ritual practices, which was what original Tantrism meant, eventually dissolved into a collateral duality, out of which emerged the speculations of Samkhya on the one hand, and the practical discipline of Yoga on the other. In course of time, both Samkhya and Yoga were brought on to idealistic lines: but the old bond between the two was never completely forgotten, though in the later periods, the memory of this was rationalised by the idea that some form of synthesis of Samkhya and Yoga had once taken place. Historically, however, as we shall try to argue, the very opposite was the case. Tantrism was the original complex out of which emerged the Samkhya and the Yoga of the later times. But just as, because of the uneven development, people in the primitive tribal conditions have continued to live in India side by side the civilized and sophisticated societies, so, in the field of ideology, by the side of the later sophisticated Samkhya and Yoga there survived also the Tantrika beliefs and practices, still representing the primordial complex out of which Samkhya and Yoga eventually developed. But more of this later.

To recapitulate: the problem of the lost Lokayata led us to raise questions concerning the *asura*-views and of Tantrism in general and these questions, in their turn, introduced fresh problems concerning the sources of the Samkhya philosophy. Was there, then, any connection between Lokayata and Samkhya? According to the Jaina tradition, the answer is in the affirmative.

180 ERE vi. 706.

This has already been pointed out by Dasgupta:[181]

After the treatment of the views of the *lokayata nastikas*, the *Sutra Kritanga Sutra* treats of the *Samkhyas*. In this connection Silanka says that there is but little difference between the *lokayata* and the Samkhya, for though the Samkhyas admit souls, these are absolutely incapable of doing any work, and all the work is done by *prakriti* which is potentially the same as the gross elements. The body and the so-called mind is therefore nothing but the combination of the gross elements, and the admission of separate *purusas* is only nominal. Since such a soul cannot do anything and is of no use (*akimcitkara*), the Lokayatas flatly deny them.

This close relation between the Lokayata and Samkhya, as suggested by the Jaina sources, will appear to be somewhat strange. But the reason may be that, on the one hand, we have mistakenly relied too much on Madhava's version of the Lokayata, while, on the other, we are yet to arrive at correct ideas concerning the original Samkhya. However, from the point of view of what we are trying to argue, the close relation between the Lokayata and Samkhya, far from being strange, is only what is to be expected. Lokayata might have originally meant those obscure beliefs and practices which are broadly referred to as Tantrism, and Tantrism is found to have fundamental similarities with original Samkhya. At any rate, the problem of Lokayata cannot be properly understood without entering into the questions concerning original Samkhya and, further, it may be that an enquiry into the origin of Tantrism will throw light on both Lokayata and Samkhya. Thus, one of the fundamental questions we are led to ask is: What exactly was meant by original Tantrism? We shall try to answer this question in Chapter V and see that, contrary to our usual idea of Tantrism, it really represented a naturalistic trend in the philosophical heritage of India. It was, moreover, characterised by a distinctly democratic attitude. As a matter of fact, its affiliation to the crafts and professions traditionally despised was greatly responsible for its being continually misunderstood. The closest parallel is to be found in Taoism of ancient China. Indeed, the similarities between Taoism and Tantrism were fundamental. Thanks to the recent monumental work of J. Needham,[182] we are now in a position to understand this point correctly. What has become clear by his analysis of the significance of ancient Taoism may help us to understand what is yet obscure about our ancient Tantrism.

[181] HIP iii. 527.

[182] SCC ii. 33-164.

Reserving these discussions for the future, we may here confine ourselves to one important feature of ancient Tantrism. It is its emphasis on the sexual union.

20. Sex Rituals

Gunaratna said that the Lokayatikas indulged in periodic promiscuity. This was obviously a reference to the so-called *vamacari* theory and practice of Tantrism. *Vama* meant the female and probably also the eros (*kama*); in the context of Tantrism it meant both. For Tantrism is largely the practice (*acara*) centred in the female and also in the sexual union. The meaning usually attributed to *vamacara*, namely left-hand practice,[183] is really misleading.

There is no doubt that this aspect of Tantrism has provoked the most violent revulsion in our modern schools. Rajendralal Mitra[184] referred to this when he wrote that in Tantrism

> theories are indulged in, and practices enjoined which are at once the most revolting and horrible that human depravity could think of, and compared to which the words and specimens of Holiwell Street literature of the last century would appear absolutely pure.

To discuss these matters openly, said Sastri,[185] one had to transgress the limits of civilization and probably stood the risk of facing the Indian Penal Code. It was because of this *vamacara*, again, that Crooke[186] characterised Tantrism as 'the most debased side of Hinduism.'

There is no doubt that, judged by modern moral values, much of Tantrism appears to be outrageous and absurd. However, it is not enough to stop our enquiry with a simple judgement. For the fact is that the profligacy which notoriously characterised Tantrism could not have been merely a mark of perversion. There are at least two important reasons for this.

First, Tantrism had been, as it is correctly and repeatedly said, one of the most powerful factors in the development of Indian culture. We cannot, therefore, look at Tantrism as mere perversion without at the same time looking at ourselves as a nation of perverts. Sentiments apart, such a conclusion would be objectively absurd. In all likelihood, therefore, there must have been some original significance attributed to these peculiar beliefs and practices, which we are apt to miss if we allow ourselves to

183 See ch. iv. sec. 2.
184 Quot. by Sastri *BD* (B) 82.
185 *Ib.* 83.
186 ERE vi. 705.

be carried away by a spirit of sheer moral repugnance. The *vamacara* of Tantrism, since our ancestors were so serious about it, could not have *meant mere perversion*, though these *are* manifestly so if practised in the context of our developed knowledge and moral values. And it is necessary to know why our ancestors had such absurd beliefs in order to understand how we have become what we are today.

The second argument is no less important and we shall discuss this in somewhat greater detail. That the original significance of ritual sex union could not have been mere perversion is proved by the circumstance that the other important trend of Indian culture, namely the Vedic one, is not without strong relics of the same or similar beliefs and practices. In fact, the Vedic literatures are full of these. Contemporary exponents of Indian culture, in their zeal to save their Aryan ancestors from the indignities of such beliefs and practices, usually try to hush up these evidences. But it is necessary to face facts rather than to delude ourselves with a fanciful story of our ancient heritage. We shall, therefore, quote some of the passages from the Vedic literatures and try to understand these.

Following is the *Vamadevya Saman* of the *Chandogya Upanisad*:[187]

> One summons—that is a *Himkara*.
> He makes request—that is a *Prastava*.
> Together with the woman he lies down—that is an *Udgitha*.
> He lies upon the woman—this is a *Pratihara*.
> He comes to the end—that is a *Nidhana*.
> He comes to the finish—that is a *Nidhana*.
> This is the *Vamadevya Saman* as woven upon copulation.
>
> He who knows thus this *Vamadevya Saman* as woven upon copulation comes to copulation, procreates himself from every copulation, reaches a full length of life, lives long, becomes great in offspring and in cattle, great in fame. One should never abstain from any woman. That is his rule.

Saman meant Vedic chanting. The Vedic sages attached great significance to this practice. *Himkara, Prastava, Udgitha,* etc., were the five divisions of the fivefold *Saman*. Evidently, the author of the *Upanisad*, by identifying the different stages of coition with these divisions of Vedic chanting, wanted to attach greater importance to the former. The benefits imagined to result from the sexual act, judged by the standards of the undeveloped conditions of those days were colossal: 'pro-

187 ii. 13 (tr. Hume).

creates himself from every copulation, reaches a full length of life, lives long, becomes great in offspring *and in cattle,* great in fame.' The mention of cattle is significant. Because, till the time of the *Upanisads,* material wealth was largely measured in terms of it. This shows that the Upanisadic speculator was dwelling here on a belief according to which reproduction could not be viewed as detached from production: *kama* or the sexual union was imagined to be an aid to *artha* (*pasu*) or material wealth as well. Whatever may be the contemporary judgement upon it, from the point of view of this ancient belief, it was obviously a piece of wisdom to say, 'One should never abstain from any woman. That is his rule.'

The *Upanisads* are called Vedanta, literally the end of the *Vedas,* because, though chronologically separated from the *Vedas* by many centuries, they were somehow or other appended to the *Vedas.* This connection between the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads* was thus artificially conceived. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the authors of the *Upanisads* were philosophizing on the experiences, ideas and beliefs of their ancestors—the early Vedic people, because these were transmitted to them by a peculiarly unbroken oral tradition. The belief underlying the *Vamadevya Saman* of the *Chandogya Upanisad* was obviously such a one. We come across the same belief in the *Samhitas* themselves. In the *Atharva Veda,*[188] for example, sexual intercourse was conceived in terms of the churning of fire by rubbing two pieces of wood, *asvattha* and *sami* :

> The *asvattha* (*ficus religiosa*) has mounted the *sami* (*mimosa suma*): then a male child was produced. That, forsooth, is the way to obtain a son; that we do bring to our wives.

Of course this hymn was employed in a ceremony calculated to ensure the birth of a male child.[189] Nevertheless, conceiving the sexual act in terms of churning the fire is highly significant, because the latter was of vital importance to the early Vedic peoples in their performance of *Yajna* or the ritual. Besides, as is well known, the sexual act, along with the dialogues describing it, was, according to the *Vajasaneyi Samhita,*[190] a very important aspect of the *Asvamedha Yajna.*

This leads us to the question of Vedic rituals, the *Yajnas.* We shall see later that the *Yajnas* were originally thought of as means or aids to the productive activity of the early Vedic peo-

188 SBE xlii. 97. 189 *Ib.* xlii. 460. 190 *VS* xxiii. 26 ff.

ples. What is important here is to note that according to the ancient Vedic beliefs the process of *Yajna* and the process of sexual union were often inextricably mixed up; the very images with which *Yajna* was understood and explained were often the images of the sexual union. This is evident from the *Brahmanas*, the works on the rituals that came in between the *Samhitas* and the *Upanisads*.

> A pap in *ghee* should he offer, who considers himself unsupported; in this (earth) does he not find support who does not find support. *Ghee* is the milk (blood?) of the woman, the rice grains that of the man; that is a pairing; with a pairing verily thus does he propagate him with offspring and cattle, for generation; he is propagated with offspring and with cattle who knows thus.[191]

The commentators said that by 'unsupported' was meant 'being without offspring and cattle.' The remedy suggested consisted of a ritual mixing of *ghee* with rice grain and this process was symbolic of copulation: the *ghee* standing for female blood and the rice grains for the male semen and it was an ancient belief[192] that the female blood mixed with the male semen produced the fetus. *Pairing* meant this. What needs to be noted here is that this process was imagined to generate not only the offspring but *also the cattle* and thereby to remove the state of being unsupported.

This passage of the *Aitareya Brahmana* occurs in the context of the *Soma* ritual. Other passages in the context of the other rituals show the same overwhelming importance attributed to the sexual union:

> 'Forward to your god Agni' are *Anustubh* (verses). He separates the two first *padas*; therefore a woman separates her thighs, He creates the last two *padas*; therefore a man unites his thighs. That is a pairing; verily thus he makes a pairing at the beginning of the litany, for generation; he is propagated with offspring, with cattle, who knows thus.[193]

In the *Kausitaki Brahmana,*[194] practically the same was repeated:

> Then he recites the seven-versed *Ajya*.... It is in *Anustubh* verses; the *Anustubh* is speech; whatever is described by speech, the *Anustubh*, all that he obtains. He separates the two *padas;* that is a symbol of generation; a man takes apart as it were (the limbs) of his wife. Further, in that he takes apart, that is a symbol of support.

[191] Keith RVB 107.
[192] Vedantavagish *SD* (B) 203.
[193] Keith RVB 159.
[194] *Ib.* 423-4.

The symbolic (and sometimes overt) emphasis on the importance of sexual intercourse is to be found most frequently in the *Satapatha Brahmana*.[195]

After the *Brahmanas* came the *Upanisads*. We naturally find the philosophers of the *Upanisads* still considering it to be a piece of divine wisdom[196] to identify *Yajna* with sexual union. The following story was told by the two major *Upanisads*, the *Chandogya*[197] and the *Brihad Aranyaka*.[198]

Svetaketu Aruneya went up to an assembly of the Pancalas. There he was asked by Pravahana Jaibali, 'Have you been instructed by your father?' Svetaketu answered in the affirmative. To test his knowledge, however, Pravahana Jaibali put five questions to him, none of which he could answer. So he returned disgruntled to his father, Gautama. Gautama, too, did not know the answers to these questions. So he himself went to Pravahana Jaibali to get enlightened. He learnt the answers after going through the preliminary disciplines.

One of the questions was: 'Do you know how in the fifth oblation water comes to have a human voice?'[199] The answer ultimately given was as follows:[200]

> Man, verily, O Gautama, is a sacrificial fire. In this case speech is the fuel; breath, the smoke; the tongue, the flame; the eyes, the coals; the ear, the sparks.
>
> In this fire the gods offer food. From this oblation arises semen.
>
> Woman, verily, O Gautama, is a sacrificial fire. In this case the sexual organ is the fuel; when one invites, the smoke; the vulva, the flame; when one inserts, the coals; the sexual pleasure, the sparks.
>
> In this fire the gods offer semen. From this oblation arises the fetus.
>
> Thus indeed in the fifth oblation water comes to have a human voice.
>
> After he has lain within for ten months, or for however long it is, as a fetus covered with membrane, then he is born.

Obviously, this was how the Upanisadic philosophers were looking at the process of human reproduction. But it was also the *Yajna* process, as understood by them. This point was continued in the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*.[201] But we need not quote the details.

[195] SBE xii. 194, 257 ff, 261 ff, 277, 281, 334, 336, 377 ff, 381, 386, 388, 395 ff, 398; xxvi. 61, 90 ff, 131, 212-5, 318, 327, 365-9, 437 ff; xliv. 15, 56, 171, 179 ff, 192, 199, 211 ff, 215, 219 ff, 239 ff, 248 ff, 254, 349, 384, 391.

[196] *Br Up* vi. 2.6. [197] v. 3ff. [198] vi. 2ff.

[199] *Ch Up* v. 3.3; *Br Up* vi. 2.2.

[200] *Ch Up* v. 7.1—v. 9.1 (tr. Hume). [201] vi. 4.2—11.

We may now return to the question of *vamacara* in the Lokayatika tradition, Lokayata being understood in the broader sense of Tantrism. It was primarily because of this *vamacara* that those who, in the later days, claimed to have been the inheritors of the Vedic tradition hated and denounced Tantrism. We have argued that such an attitude can hardly be justified. For, very strong relics of the same or similar *vamacara* practices characterised the Vedic tradition itself. Besides, the Vedic evidences make it quite clear that some significance other than mere perversion must have been originally attributed to this sexual union; or else, the ancient sages would not have equated it to the Vedic chanting (*Saman*) and the Vedic ritual (*Yajna*). Our problem, therefore, is to understand the ancients and to find out what inspired them to attach so much of importance to these apparently peculiar beliefs and ideas. And in order to find it out it may be necessary for us to follow some method other than the traditional one, because the traditional method cannot explain these.

21. Veda and Lokayata

We have been arguing that the later champions of the Vedic tradition, in denouncing Tantrism for its *vamacara*, were also denouncing their own past. For, the same or similar beliefs very strongly characterised early Vedic culture itself.

It will be argued, that such beliefs and ideas, though found in the Vedic literatures, were obviously primitive and, therefore, in all probability, originally formed part of the beliefs and ideas of the local aborigines; as the Vedic Aryans came in contact with them the Vedic outlook got contaminated by these primitive elements. This argument would find favour with many modern scholars, it being a favourite hypothesis with them that the Vedic peoples freely borrowed ideas and beliefs from the local aborigines, and this led the aboriginal elements to creep into the Vedic outlook.[202] Indian culture, it is repeatedly said, represented a wonderful synthesis of the Aryan and the non-Aryan elements. Let us call this the hypothesis of adoption and absorption.

There are, however, many reasons against this hypothesis. We shall mention three of these, the first two being concerned

[202] Hopkins in PAOS (1894) cliv ff; Gough PU 18; Keith RPV 81, 24, 31, etc.

with the general possibility of this hypothesis itself, while the third would be against the specific possibility of the elements of *vamacara* in the Vedic literatures being the result of such a process of absorption.

First, the Vedic peoples themselves must have had a primitive past and as such, assuming such beliefs and ideas to be elements of primitive thought, these could as well have been the survivals or the relics of the primitive past of the Vedic peoples themselves. All that is primitive in the Vedic literature was not necessarily aboriginal elements creeping from outside into the Vedic outlook.

Secondly, the terminologies are racial and the process of cultural exchange is conceived vaguely and often even mysteriously. The theories are, in fact, based on a rather superficial view of culture as such. Ideas and beliefs are looked at as if they were like ready-made clothes that could fit anyone.

We hear much of the general theory of cultural diffusion. The theory itself is yet in need of being fully worked out. In the meanwhile, as Thomson[203] has remarked, there is the risk of exaggerating its significance.

> Since the function of all social institutions, alien or indigenous, is to satisfy some need, the origin of this or that custom is not explained by saying that it was borrowed from abroad. As Ferguson remarked, 'Nations borrow only what they are nearly in a condition to have invented themselves.'

Thus, if this hypothesis of the fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan elements in Indian culture is ever really established, it will be established only on the basis of a clear knowledge of the material needs of the peoples that led them to borrow from each other. How far such a need was actually there is a point to be decided by detailed historical researches. Before, however, one proceeds to undertake these, it is necessary for one to be quite clear about the general theoretical position about this material need itself.

Culture does not enjoy an existence-in-itself. It is not a kind of floating entity that may get attached to any and every life-pattern. The usual analogy for it is that of the superstructure of the materialistic conception of history. As Marx and Engels said:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material

[203] Thomson AA 4.

intercourse of men, the language of real life.... Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.[204]

These general considerations apart, there is a definite and specific reason because of which we cannot look at the ritual emphasis on the sexual union in the Vedic literatures as non-Aryan beliefs absorbed by it. The general structure of Vedic thought within which these elements are found is definitely distinct from that of Tantrism. The Vedic people imagined that the sexual union would increase their material wealth. This material wealth was conceived primarily in terms of cattle. That is, the Vedic ideas were the ideas of a predominantly pastoral people. By contrast, the *vamacara* of Tantrism, as we shall see later, though based on the same belief that human coition would enhance material prosperity, conceived the material wealth mainly in terms of agricultural products. That is, these were ideas of an essentially agricultural society.

Incidentally, it may be noted here that there are grounds to presume that the Lokayatikas, too, were arguing in favour of the supreme importance of agriculture. Even the name Lokayata can be interpreted in a way that suggests this point. It is *loka* and *ayata*. The word *ayata* may be derived as *a* + *yat* + *a*, meaning in the proper way (*a*) to make effort (*yat*).[285] And, as Monier-Williams showed,[206]

in the oldest texts *loka* is generally preceded by '*u*'; and '*u*' may be a prefixed vowel and *uloka* a collateral dialectic form of *loka;* according to others *u-loka* is abridged from *uru-* or *ava-loka,* and thus meant 'free or open space'; further, this word *loka* is comparable to the Latin *lucus,* originally 'a clearing of a forest' and to the Lithunian *laukas,* a field.

Were the Lokayatikas those who were making efforts in a proper way (*ayata*) to clear the forest and prepare fields for agriculture (*loka*)? In any case, according to both *Brihaspati Sutra*[207] and *Prabodhacandrodaya*,[208] the Lokayatikas considered *varta* to be of very great importance and *varta* primarily meant agriculture. And if the *vamacara* of Tantrism formed part of the beliefs of the agricultural people, then, from this point of view, too, our

[204] Marx & Engels GI 13-4. [205] Dasgupta HIP iii. 514.
[206] SED 906. [207] Sastri L 3. [208] *P Act* ii.

hypothesis as to the identity of Tantra and Lokayata becomes all the more legitimate.

The second characteristic of the ritual sexuality of the Vedic literatures is that it was dominated by the most exaggerated ideas of male superiority, The *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*, for example, looked at the whole thing from the point of view of the male and did not hesitate to recommend extreme measures to overpower and humiliate the female:

If she still does not grant him his desire, he should hit her with a stick or with his hand, and overcome her, saying: 'With power, with glory, I take away your glory!' Thus she becomes inglorious.[209]

This is in most striking contrast to the fundamentals of Tantrism, in which the female principle is personified and made prominent to the almost total exclusion of the male. Arthur Avalon[210] has put the point very clearly:

This sect hold women in great esteem and call them Saktis (power) and to illtreat a Sakti—that is, a woman—is held to be a crime. H. H. Wilson also himself points out, that women, as manifestations of the Great Cause of all, are entitled to respect and even to veneration. Whoever offends them incurs the wrath of *prakriti*, the Mother of all, whilst he who propitiates them offers worship to *prakriti* Herself.

And so, at a time when, the rite of *Sati* as some allege, was being practised in accordance with the Vedas, and many a woman was being horribly oppressed, it was the *Mahanirvana Tantra* which forbade it on the ground above stated. In conformity, also, with these views, we find, according to the Tantra, alone of all the great *Sastras*, that a woman may be a spiritual teacher (*guru*), and initiation by her achieves increased benefit.

Such an attitude, as we shall see in Chapter IV and V, could be the characteristic product of the social system known as mother-right and this is why we cannot fully understand the problem of the Lokayata without entering into the question of mother-right in India.

To sum up: The ritual importance of sexual union, as found in the Vedic literatures, formed part of the pastoral-patriarchal ideas. By contrast, the Lokayata tradition retained the same belief as forming part of the agricultural-matriarchal ideas. We shall later discuss the importance of this distinction. For the present, our point is that the one could not have borrowed from the other and that the emphasis on sexual matters which we come

209 *Br Up* vi. 4.7. 210 PT *Pref.* xviii.

across in Tantrism must have had some significance other than mere perversity. As such, it is not logical to condemn Tantrism merely for this. It is particularly illogical for those who claim to be the champions of the Vedic tradition to be indignant at Tantrism for its sexual theories and practices, because the early Vedic peoples were themselves believing in and practising the same things.

22. Recapitulation

Lokayata meant the philosophy of the people. It also meant the philosophy of this-worldliness or instinctive materialism. The original works of the Lokayatikas being lost beyond any prospect of recovery, we have got to reconstruct it mainly on the basis of the references to them found in the writings of their opponents. One of these opponents was Madhavacarya. In his *Sarva Darsana Samgraha* he gave us a version of the Lokayata. Modern scholars have so far accepted it as the basic source of our knowledge of the lost Lokayata. But evidences, both internal and external, are against the authenticity of Madhava. Because of the fact that different modern scholars have, in different ways, tried to reconcile Madhava's version of the Lokayata with the different pieces of additional evidences obtained from other sources, we have a multiplicity of modern theories about ancient Indian materialism. Nevertheless, there are elements of truth in all these, in spite of their mutual contradictions. The contradictions may be resolved if we liberate ourselves from the influence of Madhava. For, when we do so, we find that the data on which these theories are based appear to have a convergent suggestion. The suggestion is that by Lokayata was meant those popular and obscure beliefs and practices that are broadly referred to as Tantrism. Spiritual and other-worldly ideas were subsequently superimposed on Tantrism; but original Tantrism, like its more philosophical version known as the Samkhya, was atheistic and materialistic.

But Tantrism repels the modern mind mainly because of its obsession with sex. Those who claimed in the later times to be champions of the Vedic tradition, were full of contempt for Tantrism mainly because of this. Yet these same elements strongly characterised the ancient Vedic outlook itself. Therefore the presumption is that these had originally some significance other

than what the modern mind is hastily inclined to attribute to them. The problem of the ancient Lokayata thus becomes largely the problem of finding out this original significance.

But the question is: How are we to do it? What, in other words, is the method that we ought to follow?

In the next chapter, therefore, we shall take up the problem of the method.

Chapter Two

THE CHANTING DOGS

A STUDY IN THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

In this chapter we are going to argue that certain obscure and even apparently meaningless fragments of our ancient philosophical literatures may be understood if interpreted according to the principles followed by Thomson in his recent Greek *Studies*. The broader question of the value and validity of these principles for the general purpose of reconstructing the history of ancient Indian philosophy would be discussed, at least partially, in the chapters to follow. However, lest we deviate too much from our central theme, I have chosen here, as specimen of such obscure fragments, a passage, which, notwithstanding all its strangeness, reveals, on the whole, a stark materialistic outlook.

1. An Obscure Passage

Following is the 12th Section of the First Chapter of the *Chandogya Upanisad*. This passage is complete in itself.

Now next the *Udgitha* of the dogs. So Baka Dalbhya,—or Glava Maitreya—went forth for Veda-study.

Unto him there appeared a white dog. Around this one, other dogs gathered and said: 'Do you, Sir, obtain food for us by singing. Verily, we are hungry.'

Then he (the white dog) said to them: 'In the morning may you assemble unto me here at this spot.' So Baka Dalbhya,—or Glava Maitreya—kept watch.

Then even as (priests) here, when they are about to chant the *Bahispavamana Stotra*, glide hand in hand, so did they glide on. Then they (the dogs) sat down and performed the preliminary vocalising (*himkara*).

(They sang): 'Om! Let us eat. Om! Let us drink! Om! Deva, Varuna, Prajapati, Savitri, gather food here. O Lord of Food! Gather food here.—Yea, gather it here. Om!'

The translation above (as well as those other passages from the *Upanisads* quoted in this chapter) is broadly based upon that of Hume and following are the necessary word notes:[1]

Udgitha, in the wider sense, means the chanting of the *Sama Veda,* specially of the exact *Sama Veda* without additions. In the narrower sense, however, *Udgitha* means loud chanting and is the third division of the five-fold *Saman,* the two preceding it being *himkara* (preliminary vocalising) and *prastava* (introductory praise) and the two following it being *pratihara* (response) and *nidhana* (conclusion).

Bahispavamana is the name of a Vedic *Stoma* (praise, eulogium, hymn, a typical form of chant) sung outside the *vedi* (altar) during the morning libation.

The special interest of the passage consists in this that by placing the highest value on the material means of subsistence, it reveals a rather stark materialistic outlook, though, of course, a primitive and crude one. As a matter of fact, if we agree to derive the name Carvaka from *carva,*[2] that is to eat or to chew, then the strange creatures described in our passage, because they sing only of eating and drinking and obtaining the food, may even be considered a group of Carvakas. What makes this so peculiar is the circumstance that this passage forms part of a *Upanisad,* usually taken to be the repository of spiritual wisdom.

2. Who was Baka Dalbhya?

The central theme of the passage is obviously the strange scene of the chanting dogs. But this scene was not depicted for its own sake; rather, it was *specifically meant to be witnessed by a certain person called Baka Dalbhya.* Therefore, some light may be thrown on it if we can determine the nature of this person—i.e. his views or ideological affiliations. The modern scholars have, unfortunately, ignored this possibility.

Perhaps a clue as to his viewpoint can be found in the words *svadhyayam udvavraja* of the text. These words, from the strict grammatical point of view, should be rendered as 'renounced the Veda-studies,' rather than as 'went forth for Veda-studies', as in the translation we have used. Though all the traditional interpretations would go against rendering the

[1] See Monier-Williams SED.

[2] *TRD* 300.

words as 'renounced the Veda-studies,' such an understanding, apart from being literal, has an additional advantage. It may help us to understand the alternative name of the person. *Glava* literally means the displeased: obviously a person displeased with the *Vedas* would renounce it. Of course, whether there is any technical difficulty in rendering 'Glava Maitreya' as 'Maitreya, the displeased' is a question which should not be ignored.

Such an interpretation would suggest that the person was a heretic from the Vedic point of view. The suggestion gains in strength because of some more evidences that are external to the *Chandogya Upanisad*.

The *Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana*[3] related how a certain Baka Dalbhya was using violence against Indra, the lord supreme of the Vedic pantheon. The *Kathaka Samhita*[4] described him as engaged in a ritual dispute with Dhritarastra. These suggest, therefore, that he was one of the disgruntled elements. Of course, these sources did not mention the alternative name, Glava Maitreya. We have, therefore, some hesitation in identifying him with the Baka Dalbhya of the *Chandogya Upanisad*. Nevertheless, this cannot be a definite ground to disprove the identity, particularly because in the *Chandogya Upanisad*[5] itself we find the name Baka Dalbhya mentioned elsewhere without the alternative Glava Maitreya. Further, Weber and Grierson have claimed that Baka Dalbhya was a Pancala and the Pancalas were anti-Brahmanical.[6] This may lend additional support to the presumption that he might have been a heretic from the Vedic point of view.

However, there are certain difficulties in accepting this view of the ideological affiliation of the person. The evidence of the *Chandogya Upanisad* itself appears to go against it. The same text, in a different context, describes him as possessing and practising the wisdom of Vedic chanting: 'Baka Dalbhya knew it (that is, the secret of the Vedic chanting). He became *Udgatri*-priest of the people of Naimisa.'[7] In the *Mahabharata*,[8] too, we find him advising Yudhistira on matters of ritual procedure.

These evidences, therefore, appear to clash with those pre-

[3] i. 9. 2. [4] xxx. 2.
[5] i. 2.13. Macdonell & Keith (VI ii. 58, 236) thought that the same person was referred to in all these texts.
[6] See Macdonell & Keith VI i. 165.
[7] i. 2. 13. [8] Tr. Ray iii. 74.

viously quoted and indicate that Baka Dalbhya was far from being a heretic, or that he could not have renounced the Veda-studies. A way out of the confusion may possibly be suggested. Admitting the seriousness of both sets of evidences we may imagine that either he was originally a Vedic priest who eventually renounced the *Vedas* or he was originally a disbeliever, eventually converted to the Vedic path. The circumstance of his possessing two *gotra*-names[9] may also indicate some kind of conversion having taken place in his life. For, the commonly accepted interpretation of this dual name, originally suggested by Samkara,[10] namely, that he could have been the son of a married woman by somebody else's husband (*dvyamusyayana*), cannot be supported by any text.

In the face of all these complexities, it is obviously not possible for us to say anything definite as to the nature of the person before whom was revealed the strange scene of the chanting dogs. However, for the purpose of our argument it may be sufficient to confine ourselves to the two alternative possibilities concerning his views or affiliations.

3. Modern Interpretation

We have argued at length on the ideological affiliation of the person. He was either one who renounced the Veda-studies or one who sought them. If the former be the case, then the scene of the chanting dogs, which was designed specifically to be witnessed by him, could only be meant to restore in him his shaken convictions. In the latter alternative it could only be meant to reveal to him the knowledge he wanted. The two suggestions are convergent: *the scene was somehow or other connected with what the author of this passage considered to be the essence of the Vedic wisdom, or, more specifically, the wisdom of Vedic chanting*. This will appear to be most strange. How could such a highly peculiar scene have anything to do with the Vedic wisdom, or the wisdom of the Vedic chanting? Yet, as we have just seen, an analysis of the context in which the scene occurs cannot have any other implication.

We shall presently return to discuss the significance originally attributed to Vedic chanting and see the possible relation of this strange scene to it. Before, however, we do it we may

9 See Kosambi JBBRAS xxvi. 23.
10 On *Ch Up* i. 12. 1.

briefly review the standard interpretation of the passage offered by the modern scholars.

Whether the scene depicted before Baka Dalbhya was meant to restore in him his shaken convictions, or, whether it was meant to impart to him the knowledge he sought for—we are under the obligation to admit that the authors of the text could not have meant it to be a joke or a mockery. The passage, in other words, was meant to be a serious one. This point is important, because it is crucial. It disproves the view of the modern scholars that the whole thing was only a satire on the performance of the Vedic priests. Radhakrishnan observed:[11]

> There are occasions when the sacrificial and priestly religion strikes them (i.e., the authors of the *Upanisads*) as superficial, and then they give vent to all their irony. They describe a procession of dogs to march like a procession of the priests, each holding the tail of the other in front and saying, 'Om! let us eat; Om, let us drink!'

Rhys Davids[12] discovered in this passage 'a spirit of subtle irony,' which, according to him, was peculiarly Indian.

> What is the especial point in this fun—a kind of fun quite unknown in the West? It is the piquancy of the contrast between the mock seriousness of the extravagant, even impossible details, and the real serious earnestness of the ethical tone.... In the *Upanisads* it is very marked. The Liturgy of the Dog...and several other such episodes have this mixture of unreality and earnestness.

Durant[13] practically echoed Radhakrishnan:

> That there were doubters, even in the days of the *Upanisads*, appears from the *Upanisads* themselves. Sometimes the sages ridiculed the priests, as when the *Chandogya Upanisad* likens the orthodox clergy of the time to a procession of dogs each holding the tail of its predecessor, and saying, piously, 'Om, let us eat; Om, let us drink!'

Hume[14] probably felt a little less sure of the ironical motive of the passage; after describing it as a satire on the performance of the priests he has put a question mark within brackets.

More examples may be quoted; but that is not necessary. The question is: why have the modern scholars imagined this passage to have been a satirical one? There are many reasons for that.

One of the important reasons is that these scholars are very much influenced by Samkara's interpretation of the general nature of the Upanisadic (or Vedantic) thought. Samkara

[11] IP i. 149. [12] DB i. 161-2.
[13] OOH 416. [14] TPU 138.

argued that the *Upanisads* were emphasizing the importance of pure knowledge (*jnana*) by negating the value of the rituals (*karma*). But it cannot be claimed that this is the only possible interpretation of the general trend of the Upanisadic view. The question of the textual details apart, the broad fact remains that the other traditional interpreters of the *Upanisads* were against such a view. Ramanuja, for example, argued that the *Upanisads*, far from being hostile to the Vedic rituals, were really complementary to these. We cannot obviously enter here into this controversy. However, against the modern scholars it may be pointed out that as far as this particular passage is concerned Samkara[15] himself did not see any irony in it. On the contrary, he wanted to draw our attention to the context of this passage in order to show its serious implication. The preceding sections[16] of the text described famine-conditions. Driven by hunger a Vedic priest called Usasti Cakrayana was forced to eat the leavings of food of a low-born. Hence, argued Samkara, the author of this *Upanisad* was logically led to describe in the succeeding section the *Udgitha* of the dogs, because this was the method of obtaining the food, and as such, was a remedy for hunger. The white dog, according to Samkara, was either a god or a sage (*risi*) that appeared in the guise of a dog and so were the other dogs that approached him, though they were of comparatively lesser importance. But Samkara did not try to explain why the gods assumed the guise of the dogs in order to impart the divine wisdom.

4. Meaning of 'Dog'

This leads us to the other important reason why the modern scholars have considered the passage to be merely satirical. They have thoroughly misunderstood the dogs of the text. To them the dogs were but dogs and nothing but dogs. And since even the dogs should be given their dues, these creatures of the ancient text are imagined to have possessed even real tails! As Radhakrishnan has described them, 'each holding the tail of the other in front.' Of course the text itself did not mention the tails. Yet the tails have a rather long tale. They started

[15] On *Ch Up* i. 12. 1.

[16] *Ch Up* i. 10 & 11. Significantly, this discussion ends with the following: 'Verily, indeed, all beings here live by taking up to themselves food. This is the divinity connected with *pratihara*.'

from Samkara's commentary on the *Upanisad* (for though Samkara considered them to be gods, he thought that their disguise as dogs was a real one) and reached Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy* via Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East.*[17]

But how, it will be asked, can there be dogs without tails, and, how, further, can obviously human behaviour be described as canine without there being any sting about it?

It is true that both possibilities appear remote to the modern mind. But the text we are discussing is not a modern one. It is an ancient text and it refers to the ancient realities. Therefore, in order to understand it properly, we should look at it from the point of view of the ancients rather than impose upon it the preoccupations of our own. And when we do it, we shall easily see that the dogs of our passage are neither gods in Samkara's sense nor dogs in the sense of our modern scholars but simply a group of human beings.

6. Animal Names in Vedic Literatures

Things in the past must have been fundamentally different in many ways from how we look at these in our own times. Animal names were then freely used in the human context and this without the slightest malice. We may have some examples of this from the Vedic literatures.

The *Vedas,* that is the Vedic *Samhitas,* are said to have had many *sakhas* or recensions. Most of these are lost to us. Only the names remain. But even the meanings of most of the surviving names are lost. A few of them make clear sense. Surprisingly, however, when these do so, they usually reveal their origin in the name of an animal or of a plant.

The only surviving *sakha* of the *Rig-Veda Samhita* is called the *Sakala.* It means a species of snake.[18] According to the *Pratisakhya,*[19] the same *Veda* had four more recensions called *Asvalayana, Vaskala, Samkhyayana,* and *Mandukeya.* The last one is obviously derived from the frog. It is worth enquiring whether the other three can be similarly traced to any animal (or plant) origin.

The *Puranas*[20] spoke of a thousand *sakhas* of the *Sama Veda Samhita.* These were destroyed by Indra. The action of

[17] *SBE* i. 21.
[18] *AB* iii. 43.
[19] Lahiri *RV* (B) 29.
[20] Winternitz HIL i. 163.

Indra seems puzzling. But no less puzzling are the names of the seven *sakhas* which are said to have survived Indra's onslaught. These are: *Kauthum, Satyamugra, Ranyayana, Kapola, Mahakapola, Langulika,* and *Sarduliya.* The last is definitely derived from the tiger. Others may have a similar animal origin.

Of the two well known surviving *sakhas* of the *Krisna Yajurveda Samhita* one is called the *Taittiriya.* This is clearly derived from a species of bird (*tittira*). The names of the sub-recensions or *upasakhas* of the other surviving *sakha* are quite interesting. These are *Manava, Varaha, Chagaleya, Haradraviya, Dundubha, Syamayaniya.* The first three of these are derived from the man, the boar and the goat respectively.

The names of some of the *sakhas* of the *Atharva Veda Samhita* are *Paippalada, Brahmapalasa* and *Saunaka.* Of these the first is presumably derived from the name of some bird that lived on *pipal* fruits and the last is definitely derived from that particular species of animal in which we are at the moment most interested. *Saunaka* owes its origin to 'the dog' and, of course, there was no satirical motive in the use of this name.

To sum up: the meanings of some of the names of the *sakhas* of the Vedic *Samhitas* are clear, though others are obscure, and when the meaning is clear its origin is traceable to the animal or the plant world. What is clear, however, cannot be set aside by what is obscure. It may, therefore, be argued that the Vedic seers were attaching animal names to their own literary creations.[21]

This practice died hard. Even some of the principal *Upanisads* bear obvious animal names. These are the *Svetasvatara* (from the white mule), the *Mandukya* (from the frog), the *Kausitaki* (from the owl), the *Taittiriya* (from a species of bird). Another *Upanisad,* though it is now extinct in its Samskrit form, was called *Chagaleya,* a name derived from the goat.

These facts are convincing. We should, therefore, hesitate to imagine that in the Vedic literatures animal names necessarily referred to actual animals or that the animal names being used in the human context necessarily implied a spirit of satire or irony. So the singing dogs of our Upanisadic passage might not have been dogs at all; they could have been just human beings and they were called dogs by the author of the passage

[21] The explanation seems to be that each recension was current among a specific group of people bearing a definite animal name.

not because he wanted to ridicule them and their performance but rather because of some other reason which deserves to be objectively investigated into. This presumption becomes stronger in view of the following further evidences.

6. Humans with Animal Names

In the Vedic literatures we come across various groups of human beings referred to by animal names. Here are a few examples.

The *Rig Veda*[22] referred to a people called the *Ajas*, meaning the goats. Another people were mentioned in it as the *Sigrus*.[23] It meant the horse-radishes. Similarly, we come across the *Matsyas*[24] or fishes in the same text. The *Satapatha Brahmana*[25] spoke of a certain *Matsya* king. The *Matsyas* as a people were also mentioned in the *Kausitaki Upanisad*,[26] the *Gopatha Brahmana*,[27] and even in the *Manu Samhita*.[28] The *Satapatha Brahmana*,[29] again, spoke of the creator appearing in the form of a tortoise (*kurma*). The *Aitareya Brahmana* as well as the *Atharva Veda* referred to a priestly family as *Kasyapa*,[30] meaning the tortoise.

Kasyapa was not the name of a people; it was rather the name of a *risi*, or Vedic seer. This leads us to consider the names of the famous *risis* mentioned in the Vedic literatures by obvious animal names. Macdonell[31] has already prepared a catalogue of the better known examples. These are *Kausika* (from the owl), *Mandukeya* (from the frog), *Gotama* (from the bull), *Vatsa* (from the calf) and *Sunaka* (from the dog). This list is by no means exhaustive.[32] However, the name that interests us most in this list is the last one. For, it is the problem of the singing dogs that we are trying to understand. The point is that the sage Sunaka is quite famous in the Vedic literatures, and, as against Samkara's interpretation of our Upanisadic passage, it needs to be pointed out that the Vedic literatures nowhere mentioned that the *risi* Sunaka was so called because he had really the tail of a dog or that he was fond of assuming the disguise of a dog. He was a *risi*, a human being.

22 vii. 18. 19. 23 *Ib.* 24 vii. 18. 6.
25 xiii. 5. 4. 9. 26 iv. 1. 27 i. 2. 9.
28 ii. 19; vii. 193. 29 vii. 5. 1. 5.
30 Macdonell VM 153. 31 *Ib.*
32 E.g. in *Ch Up* iv. 3, 5 the interesting name Kapeya (from monkey) occurs.

The Vedic literatures actually went a little further. In the *Aitareya Brahmana*[33] we come across the three famous brothers called *Sunah-puccha*, *Sunah-sepa* and *Sunah-langula*, meaning the dog's tail. If the dog's tail could be the source of the names of the Vedic sages, (at least Sunah-sepa was definitely a *risi*), then we should hesitate to ascribe actual tails to our Upanisadic dogs.

7. Dogs in Ancient Literatures

So it may be quite possible that the *Chandogya Upanisad* was only describing a group of persons called 'the dogs' and that they were called dogs not because the author of the passage was sarcastic about them. This possibility gains strength in view of the fact that in many other places of our ancient literatures, we come across references to human beings called after dogs.

Kautilya in his *Arthasastra*[34] spoke of a people called the dogs. They, along with a few other people, belonged to the *raja-sabdopajivi-gana*. A whole chapter of the *Harivamsa*[35] was devoted to describe the geneology of a highly respected family, called the family of dogs. The *Mahabharata*[36] referred to a section of the Yadavas called the dogs. The same epic, at least in two more places, mentioned human groups called the dogs. One of these is to be found in the *Bhisma-parva*[37] and the other in the *Sabha-parva*.[38]

Incidentally, the *Mahabharata*[39] appears to give us the impression that the various peoples mentioned in it had all sorts of animal names. Following are a few examples: the owl, the scorpion, the crow, the jackal, the donkey, the fowl, the elephant, the hare, the tortoise, the swine, the ram, the tiger, the swan, the horse, the fish.

But let us concentrate on the evidences of actual human beings called dogs. The *Karandavyuha*[40] referred to a mixed caste called the *kukkura* and the *Mahabharata*[41] to a *muni* (sage) by the same name. The *Visnu Purana*,[42] too, mentions the people called *kukkura*. More examples may be mentioned.[43]

33 Keith RVB 303-9. 34 xi. 1. 35 Ch. 38.
36 *Sabhaparva* xix. 28. 37 ix. 42.
38 lii. 16. 39 See Sen *JB* (B) 100-1.
40 Monier-Williams SED 287
41 *Ib.* 42 *Ib.* 43 *Ib.*

8. The Backward Peoples

The question is: Can we, from the point of view of our modern notions, make any sense of these ancient references to human beings described normally by animal-names? The answer would obviously be in the negative. The reason is very clear. These are references to ancient realities and ancient realities were in many respects fundamentally different from today's.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that such ancient realities are not extinct even today. If we turn over the pages of our *Census Reports*, or the works of Thurston, Risley, Russell, Iyer,—in fact any of those authors who have described for us the backward peoples of the country,—and try to prepare an exhaustive list of the names of these various peoples, we shall probably see that no known species of animals or plants is left out of it. The various tribal and semi-tribal peoples of India still call themselves by such peculiar names. Of these, the one derived from the dog is most relevant for our present discussion. We shall mention only a few examples. Risley,[44] in his description of the Oraons, spoke of the 'wild dogs.' Iyer[45] mentioned 'the dogs' among the Mysore tribes and castes. The 'wild dogs' are also there in Thurston's[46] list of the South Indian peoples. Examples like these may be multiplied. What is necessary is only to note that 'the dogs' are not at all rare among the castes and tribes of India today. And it is needless to add that these dogs, like those belonging to the Vedic literatures, are in the company of all sorts of animal-names like the tortoise and the frog, the mule and the fish. Does it not imply that the conditions still surviving among the backward peoples of our country have some light to throw on our ancient literatures?

There is, again, no mystery about this implication. Ancient literatures, being ancient, naturally reflect, or at least contain strong relics of, the ancient realities. On the other hand, the backward peoples surviving today, because of their stunted development, still retain the same ancient characteristics in a living form. This is the result of uneven development. The pace of development of all the peoples all over the world had not been the same; some are still surviving at a stage the others

[44] PI 793. [45] MTC 248.
[46] CTSI q.v. *bholia*.

passed through long ago. The point was already formulated by Kaines.[47]

These communities reflect the spiritual conduct of our ancestors thousands of times removed. We have passed through the same stages of development, physical and moral, and are what we are today because they lived, toiled and endeavoured.

However, this is true not merely on a world-scale. Uneven development had been a particularly important feature of the history of Indian society. Ancient society, in this country, existed along with the developed and civilised society. It is not extinct in India even today.

If this be true, then, we may be permitted to *try to understand what is apparently obscure in our ancient literatures in the light of what is known in general about the primitive and semi-primitive peoples surviving even today*. We shall see how far this procedure actually helps us to understand the *Chandogya*-passage we are discussing.

9. Totemism

An almost universal characteristic of ancient societies surviving today is that the peoples living therein borrow their names from the animal or the plant world. Observed Morgan:[48]

Throughout aboriginal America the gens (that is, the clan) took its name from some animal, or inanimate object, and never from a person. In this early condition of society, the individuality of persons was lost in the gens.

Thus, for example, the American tribe called the Seneca was composed of the following clans: Bear, Wolf, Beaver, Turtle, Deer, Snipe, Heron and Hawk. Similarly, the Ojibwa tribe was 'divided into about 40 exogamous...clans, of which those of the Crane, Catfish, Loon, Bear, Marten and Wolf were the principal.'[49] This practice of borrowing names from the animal world (or plant-world) is known as totemism. The term was coined from the dialect of the Ojibwa tribe of America. 'In the Ojibwa dialect,' said Morgan,[50] 'the word *totem*, quite as often pronounced *dodaim*, signifies the symbol or device of a gens (clan); thus the figure of a wolf was the totem of the Wolf-gens.'

Totemism, as revealed by later works, 'survives most com-

[47] Morgan in AS quoted it as the epigraph.
[48] Morgan AS 86. [49] ERE xii. 394.
[50] Morgan AS 170.

pletely among the lower hunting tribes of Australia; it is also found in forms more or less degenerate among more advanced tribes in America, Melaneṣia, Africa, India and other parts of Asia.'[51]

The essence of totemism is as follows. Each clan of which the tribe is composed associates itself with an animal (or a plant), which is called its totem. 'The clansmen regard themselves as akin to their totem-species and as descended from it.'[52] Thus the people belonging to the dog-clan, for example, would consider themselves to be dogs and as descended from the dog. There are also taboos, or categorical prohibitions, associated with totemism. Thus, the people of the dog-clan would be forbidden to eat dogs, that is, their own totem-species. Neither would they be allowed to marry any member belonging to the same totem-group.

It is to be noted that the relics of totemism are found to linger even among peoples that have advanced far ahead of the primitive level. Such relics obviously indicate that whatever may be the stage of development in which we find these peoples, their ancestors must have once lived in the stage of totemistic society. As Thomson[53] observed:

> Among the Indo-European, Semitic and Chinese peoples there are numerous traditions and institutions which have been assigned to a totemic origin. All these peoples are, or have been organised in tribes, and therefore the view that they too were formerly totemic will be considerably strengthened if it can be shown that totemism is an inherent feature of the tribal system.

As to the details of how the author actually argued the last point, the readers are referred to his own work. For the present our questions are: Are we to look at the animal names thus freely used by the Vedic literatures in the human context as but relics of totemism? Further, if this be so, what can we deduce from such evidences?

10. Totemism and Vedic Literatures

Macdonell[54] thought that 'there are possibly in the *Rig Veda* some survivals of totemism or the belief in the descent of the human race or of individual tribes or families from animals or plants'. Oldenberg,[55] too, considered the animal-names as relics

[51] Thomson AA 12. [52] *Ib.* 11. [53] *Ib.* 12.
[54] VM 153. [55] Keith VBYS cxxi.

of totemism; further, according to him, certain taboos in the Vedic literatures could have been but the counterparts of the same totemic belief.[56]

However, Hopkins vigorously doubted all these: 'Our learned scholar,' he wrote referring to Oldenberg, 'who is perhaps too well-read in modern anthropology, seems to give the absolute dictum that animal-names of persons and clans imply totemism.' This appeared to Hopkins as highly untenable: 'There is no proof of totemism, on the contrary there is here direct evidence that totemistic appearance may be found without totemism.'[57] What, then, is the explanation of this 'totemistic appearance'? Hopkins suggested that 'Mr Tortoise' was so called 'very likely because he was slow' and 'Mr Cucumber' owed his name probably to the circumstance of his having 'numerous family.' 'Such family events are apt to receive the mocking admiration of the contemporaries.'[58]

Practically the same argument has been adduced by Keith,[59] who also denied the totemistic survivals in the Vedic literatures.[60] Referring mainly to the evidences cited by Macdonell, he observed that 'it is most probable that some of them may be nicknames given by their too candid friends,'[61] and, referring to the views of Frazer and Oldenberg, he added that the 'use of beast or vegetable names for people is valueless as evidence, since the names may be in some cases mere nicknames.'[62]

However, this kind of argument leaves no line of demarcation between serious textual interpretation and the fabrication of pure fancy. Mr Cucumber having numerous family is nowhere mocked at in the texts and the possibility of Mr Tortoise being slow has entirely been drawn from the author's own imagination. Similarly Keith may imagine that such tribal names as the *Matsyas*, the *Ajas*, the *Sigrus*, or such names of the Vedic families as *Gotamas, Vatsas, Sunakas, Kausikas, Mandukeyas* and *Kasyapas* were but nicknames given by their too candid friends; but the authors of the Vedic literatures themselves did not betray the slightest trace of knowledge of such a possibility. We only find very deep reverence shown to such Vedic families and *risis*. We may mention a few examples from the *Chandogya Upanisad*. The *risi* Kausitaki imparted the secret knowledge

[56] Keith RPV 197.
[57] PAOS 1894. cliv.
[58] *Ib.*
[59] RPV 196-7; VBYS cxxi.
[60] JRAS (1907) 931 ff.
[61] RPV 196.
[62] VBYS cxxi.

of *Udgitha* to his son.[63] The sage Sunaka Kapeya (of the two components of the name, the first is derived from the dog, the second from the monkey) imparted secret knowledge to a student.[64] Similarly, the story of Sunah-sepa as told by the *Rig Veda* and the *Aitareya Brahmana,* was told in all seriousness and without any 'mocking admiration.'

Besides, the *risis* were not the lone bearers of animal names. As we have seen, parts and branches of the Vedic literatures were often named after well known animals. Were these mere nicknames (Keith), or, the results of mocking admiration (Hopkins)? Obviously not. The only explanation is that the authors and the perpetuators of such texts were the descendants of peoples that looked at these animals with special reverence; that is, they belonged to originally totemic clans bearing such names.

But why was Hopkins so keen on denying the totemic survivals? Because he wanted to save the Aryans 'of the indignities of contemporary anthropology.'

> Clearly enough, it is in the later literature that one is brought into closest rapport with the anthropological data of the other peoples. This is due to the fact that the more the Hindus penetrated into India the more they absorbed the cult of the un-Aryan nations and it is from this rather than the refined priestliness of the Rig-Vedic Aryans that we may get parallels to the conceptions of cis-Indic Barbarism.[65]

Too many assumptions are involved here. The Rig-Vedic Aryans, whoever they might have been and whatever might have been the stage of development reflected in their literatures, were after all human beings and like all human beings they, too, had to begin their 'existence on earth at the bottom of the scale, instead of at the top,' and had gradually to work upward. In short, they, too, must have had a primitive past. As such, there is nothing improbable in the idea that even in their later literatures relics of this primitive past were retained. It would, therefore, be a wrong appreciation of their literatures to view any and every survival of the primitive characteristic as but the non-Aryan elements absorbed by them. Besides, beliefs and ideas, do not fit people indiscriminately. Therefore, rather than viewing these totemic evidences in the Vedic literatures as absorbed from the non-Aryans or pre-Aryans, it would be more logical to characterise them as but survivals of the primitive past of the Vedic people themselves.

[63] i. 5. 2. [64] iv. 3. 5. [65] *Op. cit.* clv.

We may now look more closely into Keith's argument. His argument appears to be that only *some* totemic features are present in the Vedic literatures, and not *all*. Therefore, 'the use of beast or vegetable names for people is valueless as evidence.'[66]

In the Vedic religion there is not a single case in which we can trace any totem-clan which eats sacramentally the totem animal or plant, and, therefore, the most essential feature of totemism on Reinach's theory does not even begin to appear in the *Veda*. The only point on which there is anything to be gleaned from the Vedic literature is the question of descent from animals, or plants.[67]

Apart from the question whether traces of the sacramental killing of the totem-species can really be found in the more archaic references to the *Asvamedha*[68] and the *Soma*[69] rituals, Keith's argument would be of value only against those who would claim to discover totemism in its full-fledged form in the Vedic literatures. What is actually claimed, however, is that there are only *relics* of totemistic belief there. A relic is after all a relic and a relic of totemism is not supposed to reveal all the features thereof. On the other hand, if we reject the hypothesis of these being totemic relics we shall have to prefer darkness to knowledge and say that such animal-names are of the nature of we-know-not-what. As a matter of fact, Keith's argument ultimately led him to a position like this:

... it is most probable that some of them may be nicknames given by their too candid friends, other again for *causes which we cannot know*.[70]

So there are only two alternatives—either pure fancy or pure ignorance, and all these because of a rather determined effort to resist the legitimate hypothesis.

11. Group Life

Even scholars like Macdonell and Oldenberg who have admitted the existence of totemic evidences in the Vedic literatures, have only incompletely discussed the implications of these evidences. Totemism is often looked at as a mere curiosity and the term, unfortunately, is often very loosely used. Therefore, it is rightly suggested that the term

[66] VBYS cxxi. [67] RPV 196.
[68] VBYS cxxxv. [69] *Ib.* cxxi. [70] RPV 196.

should be restricted to those cases where a systematic association of groups of persons with species of animals (occasionally plants or inanimate objects) is *connected with a certain element of social organisation.*[71]

What is the nature of this social organisation? Moret has given us a very clear answer. The true totemic society, he says,

... knows neither kings nor subjects. It is democratic or communistic; all the members of the clan live in it on a footing of equality with respect to their totem.[72]

Again,

... the active and passive subjects of obligations are collective in the regime of the totemic clan.... We are in the presence of a communal and equalitarian society in the bosom of which participation in the same totem which constitutes the essence of each and the cohesion of all, places all members of the clan on the same footing.[73]

This is primitive communism.

Since totemism survives most completely in Australia we shall confine ourselves here mainly to the Australian evidence of this primitive communism.

Said the Rev. Ridley:[74]

Communism is another law of the aborigines. They hold the doctrine of Mr. Proudhon, *La propriete c'est le vol.* Real and personal property in individuals is rendered impossible by their systematic communism.

Referring to the South Australian aborigines, Taplin[75] wrote:

Each clan has its own symbol, and every member of it regards all the other men, women, and children belonging to it as blood-relations. It is that clan-life which is the cause of the peculiar national character of the Australian tribes. In the clan there can be no personal property—all implements, weapons, etc. belong to the members collectively; every individual regards them as possessions of his clan and to be employed for its welfare and defence as occasion may require. If he has a weapon, or net, or canoe which is in some sense his own, he knows that his property in it is subject to the superior rights of the clan. Every man is interested in his neighbour's property and cares for it because it is part of the wealth of the family collectively.... One effect of this state of things is a lack of the grace of gratitude. If a man be in danger or injured, anyone of the same clan who succours him is supposed to do it more for the sake of the clan than from personal regard. Indeed, it is often the case that a man will give all the help he can to one whom he dislikes. His personal feelings are sunk for the common good; and if any kindness is shown to one of the clan, it is felt to be shown to the whole.

[71] EB xxii. 315. Italics added. [72] FTE 5.
[73] *Ib.* 14. [74] TAA 7. [75] FMCLSAA 2 ff.

Whatever injury there befalls a single individual is a general damage that befalls the whole.

These are examples of the group life of the people living in the totemic stage. If such a group life be an inherent feature of totemism, then the relic of totemism should be understood also as the relic of such group life.

12. Magic and Religion

We may now return to the strange scene of the chanting dogs.

Certain dogs were hungry. They approached a white dog and said: 'Do you, Sir, obtain food for us by singing? We are hungry.' To us, this appears strange. How could a song solve the problem of food? Nevertheless, the dogs meant it. When they sang, they sang of food and nothing but food: '*Om,* Let us eat; *Om,* Let us drink,' etc.

Thus, the actual song fulfilled the desire that occasioned it, though in fantasy.

It may be suggested that by song the dogs perhaps meant a prayer. They wanted to have food and so they requested the white dog—presumably an elder—to lead them to pray to the gods so that the gods would grant them their desire. This interpretation agrees with our modern notions, and, as a matter of fact, Samkara[76] wanted to interpret the passage somewhat on this line.

However, there are many difficulties in taking this interpretation seriously.

In the text itself we come across the word 'to sing' rather than 'to pray.' It cannot be imagined that the difference between the two words was not known to the author (or authors) of the text. In some other context of the same *Upanisad* we come across the deliberate use of the word 'to pray.'[77] Thus, since the words 'to sing' and 'to pray' are different and since this difference was clearly known to the authors themselves, we do not have the liberty to imagine that they, in our passage, meant the latter, yet wrongly used the word for the former. Besides, the actual song of the dogs, which came last, was evidently a song and not a prayer, and this in spite of the fact that the memory of certain ancient Vedic *devas* was invoked in it.

[76] On *Ch Up* i. 12. 2. [77] E.g. ii. 3. 1.

Secondly, there is another evidence, which, though external to the text itself, decisively goes against reading any prayer-motive in the song of the dogs. We have seen that the dogs were neither gods nor dogs but just a group of primitive people. We may, therefore, hope to understand their behaviour only in the light of what is known in general about the primitive peoples. So the question is: Can we really impute any prayer-motive to such peoples directly observed and known? Jane Harrison[78] has already answered the question:

The savage is a man of action. Instead of asking a god to do what he wants done, he does it or tries to do it himself; instead of prayers he utters spells. In a word, he practises magic, and above all he is strenuously and frequently engaged in dancing magical dances. When a savage wants sun or wind or rain, he does not go to church and prostrate himself before a false god; he summons his tribe and dances a sun dance or a wind dance or a rain dance. When he would hunt and catch a bear, he does not pray to his god for strength to outwit and outmatch the bear, he rehearses his hunt in a bear dance.

Harrison has used the word magic. Magic is not religion. The difference between the two is qualitative. Religion, as Thomson[79] has put it,

is characterised by belief in God and the practice of prayer or sacrifice. The lowest savages known to us have no gods and know nothing of prayer or sacrifice. Similarly, wherever we can penetrate the prehistory of civilized peoples, we reach a level at which again there are no gods, no prayer or sacrifice. What we find at this level is magic.

That the Vedic literatures contain very strong traces of magical beliefs will not be doubted by serious scholars: as is well known, practically the whole of the *Atharva Veda* is nothing more than sheer magic. So, when we penetrate into the prehistory of the Vedic people we reach a level at which there is no religion but simply magic. Unfortunately, our modern scholars[80] often use the word magic rather lightly and its qualitative difference with religion is not always clearly remembered. Thus it is necessary for us to go into some details over the general character of magical beliefs.

Magic rests on the principle that by creating the illusion that you control reality you can actually control it. In its initial stages it is simply mimetic. You want rain, so you perform a dance in which you mimic the gathering clouds, the thunderclap, and the falling

[78] AAR 30. [79] R 9.
[80] E.g. Winternitz HIL i. 125; Keith RPV 380-2, etc.

shower. *You enact in fantasy the fulfilment of the desired reality.* In its later stages the mimetic act may be accompanied by a command, an imperative 'Rain!' But it is a command, not a request. This principle of collective compulsion corresponds to *a stage of society at which the community is still an undivided whole,* supreme over each and all of its members, presenting a weak but united front against the hostile world of nature.[81]

We have emphasized two points in the quotation above because their bearing on our passage is direct and evident. The dogs wanted to have a song for the sake of food and their song was clearly a food-song. This was *enacting in fantasy the fulfilment of the desired reality.* And those who did it,—the dogs of our Upanisadic passage—we have already argued, bore the stamp of *a stage of society at which the community was still an undivided whole.* In short, that, upon which the song thrived, was magic. It could not have been a prayer. Magic is an illusory technique. But though illusory, it is not futile; it is an aid to the real technique. Thomson[82] has illustrated the point thus:

The Maoris have a potato dance. The young crop is liable to be blasted by east winds, so the girls go into the fields and dance, simulating with their bodies the rush of wind and rain and the sprouting and blossoming of the crop; and as they dance they sing, calling on the crop to follow their example. They enact in fantasy the fulfilment of the desired reality. That is magic, an illusory technique supplementary to the real technique. But though illusory it is not futile. The dance cannot have any direct effect on the potatoes, but it can and does have an appreciable effect on the girls themselves. Inspired by the dance in the belief that it will save the crop, they proceed to the task of tending it with greater confidence and so with greater energy than before. And so it does have an effect on the crop after all. It changes their subjective attitude to reality, and so indirectly it changes reality.

The efficacy of magic is thus psychological. But it is not a matter of individual psychology.

One element in the rite we have already observed, and that is, that it be done collectively, by a number of persons feeling the same emotion.... Collectivity and emotional tension, two elements that tend to turn the simple reaction into a rite, are—specially among primitive peoples—closely associated, indeed scarcely separable. The individual among savages has but a thin and meagre personality; high emotional tension is to him only caused and maintained by a thing felt socially; it is what the tribe feels that is sacred, that is matter for ritual.... Intensity, then and collectivity go together...[83]

But this primitive collectivity is undermined by the advance in the productive technique: it creates surplus and as such the

[81] Thomson R 9.
[82] SAGS i. 440.
[83] Harrison AAR 36-7.

possibility for a few to live on the labour of many.[84] But the memory of the primitive efficacy of magic does not vanish. It is rationalised as a mysterious spiritual power, the secret knowledge only of the few. That is superstition. And, as superstition, it becomes a hindrance to the real productive technique. Magic passes into its opposite. It becomes religion.

We are going to argue that with the speculators of the *Upanisads* it had already become so. However, to understand their superstitions, it is necessary to delve into their pre-history, when it had been an aid to their productive technique.

13. Song for Food

The central theme of the passage of the *Chandogya Upanisad* we are trying to understand is a song-for-the-sake-of-food. The first point to be noted is that it was not a stray thought in the text. As a matter of fact, the authors of the *Upanisad* could not conceive of a song that was not connected with the idea of obtaining the food (or of fulfilling some similar desire). This is evident from the way in which they wanted to derive the word *Udgitha* itself. According to them, the word was really some kind of an abridged sentence: *ud*, *gi* and *tha*. *Ud* meant breath, *gi* meant speech and *tha* meant food.

> *Tha* is food, for upon food this whole world is established (*sthita*).[85]

Food, therefore, was one of the components of the very conception of the *Udgitha*. And the authors of the *Upanisad* knew of no song that was not an *Udgitha*. Thus, song, as conceived by them, was inevitably a song for food.

We may now understand the general context in which the scene of the chanting dogs was placed in the *Upanisad*. The scene was not presented for its own sake. It was designed specifically to be witnessed by a certain person called Baka Dalbhya. He was either a wayward heretic in whom faith in the Vedic chanting had to be restored, or, simply a traditional seeker before whom the secret of Vedic chanting had to be revealed. In any case, the scene could only be connected with what the authors of the *Upanisad* considered to be the essence of Vedic chanting. Under these circumstances, the scene could not but have the theme of song for food. The idea of obtaining

[84] Engels OF Ch. ix.

[85] *Ch Up* i. 3. 6.

food was not, to the understanding of the authors, extrinsic to Vedic chanting.

In order to substantiate this further, it is necessary to discuss briefly the character of the Vedic songs and the general nature of the Upanisadic speculations on these.

14. Early Vedic Songs

The *Chandogya Upanisad,* in its earlier chapters, discussed the questions of speech, song and melody. This is only to be expected from the context of the text. Like the other *Upanisads,* the *Chandogya,* too, was attached to a *Veda.* The particular *Veda* to which it was attached was the *Sama Veda,* meaning 'the knowledge of melody.'[86]

Really speaking, this *Sama Veda* was not an independent *Veda.* It was simply an anthology of those verses of the *Rig Veda* which were more specifically intended to be chanted at the *Soma*-ritual. All but seventy-five verses of the *Sama Veda* occur in the 8th and 9th books of the *Rig Veda* and it has been conjectured[87] that these others, too, might have formed part of some lost recension of the *Rig Veda.* This shows that whatever the date of the compilation of the *Sama Veda,* the songs found in it were actually composed in a very remote past.

The best known recension of the *Sama Veda,* namely the *Kauthuma,* consists of two parts. In both these parts, as Winternitz[88] has observed,

> ...the text is only a means to an end. The essential element is always the melody, and the purpose of *both* parts is that of teaching the melodies.

The *Chandogya Upanisad,* forming an appendage of the *Sama Veda,* was naturally concerned with these early Vedic melodies.

It will be objected that these were melodies not in our sense of the term. Rather, these were melodies in the specific sense of forming parts of some Vedic rituals.

> The *Sama Veda* resembles the *Yajur Veda* in having been compiled exclusively for ritual application; for the verses of which it consists are all meant to be chanted at the ceremonies of the *Soma*-sacrifice.[89]

This is true. But it only means that in order to answer fully

86 Winternitz HIL i. 54.
87 *Ib.* i. 164.
88 *Ib.*
89 Macdonell HSL 171.

the questions concerning the origin of the Vedic songs, we have got to enter into the more complicated question concerning the origin of Vedic rituals. We shall, in Chapter VIII, try to discuss this problem of the sources of the Vedic rituals and we shall see there that in spite of all the complexities with which the rituals were later characterised, there are grounds to presume that these were originally aspects of the primitive labour processes of the early Vedic peoples.

For the present, we shall try to understand the above objection in a different, though obvious, sense. The Vedic songs were songs in a very special sense, because these were the earliest songs in human history of which we possess a definite literary record. These, therefore, belonged to a very early phase of human history. The pre-literate ancestors of the Vedic peoples, when they composed these early songs orally,[90] were presumably like the primitive peoples surviving today.

The point is not entirely new. Winternitz[91] has already admitted it, though partially:

> The priests and theologians certainly did not invent all these melodies themselves. The oldest of them were presumably popular melodies, to which in very early times semi-religious songs were sung at solstice celebrations and other national festivals, and yet others may date back as far as that noisy music with which the pre-Brahmanical wizard-priests—not unlike the magicians, shamans, and medicine-men of the primitive peoples — accompanied their wild songs and rites. Traces of this popular origin of the *saman* melodies are seen already in the... *stobhas* or shouts of joy, and especially in the fact that the melodies of the *Sama Veda* were looked upon as possessing magic power even as late as in Brahmanical times. There is a ritual book belonging to the *Sama Veda*, called *Sama Vidhana Brahmana*, the second part of which is a regular hand-book of magic, in which the employment of various *Samans* for magic purposes is taught. We may also see a survival of the connection of the *saman* melodies with the pre-Brahmanical popular belief and magic, in the fact that the Brahmanical law-books teach that the recitation of the *Rig Veda* and the *Yajur Veda* must be interrupted as soon as the sound of a *saman* is heard.

What the author has said is extremely important. But we cannot take it as a casual comment. Its implications are to be seriously faced. And the implications are that we have got to study the role of song and melody in the lives of the surviving savages and try to understand, in the light of this, what appears to be strange and obscure not only about the early Vedic songs, but also about the later speculations on these.

[90] *RV* i. 38. 14.

[91] HIL i. 167-8.

15. Chandogya Upanisad

The *Chandogya Upanisad,* as appended to the *Sama Veda,* has its special importance in being the earliest effort we possess of a definite literary record, towards the theoretical understanding of speech, song and melody. However, these were speech, song and melody in the special senses in which the ancestors of the authors of our text–that is the early Vedic peoples–experienced them.

This point is important because it determines our fundamental approach to the *Chandogya Upanisad.*

The time-gap between the actual composition of the early Vedic songs and the *Chandogya* speculations on these must have been enormous. Even on the most moderate estimate, it was more than two thousand years. During this period, the ideas and views of the Vedic peoples, like their social organisation, changed fundamentally. The authors of the *Upanisad* were living in an advanced stage of social development[92] and held sophisticated spiritualistic views and philosophical ideas. But it was very much different with their forefathers who actually composed these songs and melodies. They were living in primitive society.[93] We cannot attribute to them any tendency to abstract speculation, because the inaptitude for this of the primitive peoples is well known.[94] At the same time speech, song and melody must have been playing a role in their lives largely comparable to the one which these still play in the lives of the surviving savages. It was a matter of concrete experience and not of abstract speculation.

The same could not of course be a part of the living experience of the authors of the *Upanisad.* Yet its memory was not entirely lost to them. It came down to them in an unbroken continuity of oral tradition, the tenacity of which in the Vedic culture is well known. In other words, in spite of being sophisticated thinkers themselves and in spite of the fact that they were thinking largely in their own terms, what the authors of the *Upanisad* were trying to rationalise was but the memory of very archaic experiences.

It is this core of archaic experience that interests us most.

92 This remains to be argued by us in ch. viii.
93 This remains to be argued in ch. viii.
94 Briffault M ii. 503 ff.

If we do not have a clear idea of it, the speculations of the *Upanisad* will appear to us to be mysterious, even meaningless.

The Vedic songs, in their origin, were conceived by the Vedic seers to have a special efficacy. The metres, the melodies and even the very syllables and accentuations were imagined to be invested with tremendous magical power.[95] This magical power, though fantastically conceived, was originally an aid to the real material power. However, this could not have been so with the thinkers of the *Upanisad*: the context of the collective life that alone could make it real being no longer there. The only way they could try to rationalise the idea of the original efficacy was to say that it was due to some secret spiritual power. Thus the sense of the original efficacy passed into its opposite: that which was experienced as a material force was eventually explained as some mysterious spiritual feeling.

This aspect of the later rationalisation does not interest us much. Yet we cannot entirely ignore the question of the survival of the sense of the efficacy of the songs and melodies.

> ...Social institutions rendered obsolete by economic progress find a sanctuary in religion, which is of interest to the historian of humanity just because it is a stratified repository of discarded practices and discredited beliefs. Long after men have ceased in normal life to do as their forefathers did, they cling to the belief that their prosperity depends in some way on the good-will of their ancestors.[96]

However, under the changed circumstances to which these ancient beliefs and practices are brought forward, they acquire a new function. They are no longer aids to intensify the collective emotion. They begin to be proclaimed as the 'secret knowledge' of the few, the possession of which makes them superior over the rest. That is, in a society split up into classes, these become ideological weapons for class-domination.

These terminologies are modern. But the evidence of the *Upanisad* is quite clear on this point.

Upanisad meant 'secret knowledge' and this as contrasted with the *Vedas* of the past which simply meant 'knowledge.' That this 'secret knowledge' was a monopoly of the ruling class—the Ksatriyas or the kings—and further, was an important aid for their assuming and maintaining class-superiority, is a point

[95] Probably the best known example is that of Tvastri killing himself rather than the foe intended to be killed because of a wrong accentuation in uttering the spell.

[96] Thomson SAGS i. 66.

which the authors of the *Upanisads* quite proudly proclaimed. We come across this in the course of the story of the five questions put forth by Pravahana Jaibali, 'a friend of the kings' (*rajanya-bandhuh*), to Svetaketu Aruneya. The story occurs both in the *Brihad Aranyaka* and the *Chandogya Upanisad* and we have referred to it in Chapter I, Section 20. When Gautama, Svetaketu's father went to the king's palace[97] and begged of him the answers to these questions, the king said:

> As to what you have told me, O Gautama, this knowledge has never yet come to Brahmanas before you; and therefore in all the worlds has the rule belonged to the Ksatriya only.[98]

This, to say the least, is a very startling admission. If the knowledge in question was not known even to the Brahmanas, the implication is that only the Ksatriyas or kings claimed the monopoly of it. But much more startling than that was another point in the statement: *tasmad u sarvesu lokesu ksatrasyaiva prasasanam abhut*—it was because of the fact that the Ksatriyas alone possessed this knowledge that they were the rulers of all the worlds. In contemporary terminology this can only mean that the *Upanisad* or secret knowledge was an ideological weapon of the ruling class. Yet the piece of knowledge that the king eventually imparted, on closer analysis, is found to be largely a mystified version of the primitive belief underlying the fertility magic of the surviving savages.[99]

This gives us some idea of the nature of the speculations of the Upanisadic sages on the archaic beliefs that came down to them from their ancestors.

We may now return to the specific question of the *Chandogya Upanisad.* The point to be noted is that the mystification of the archaic experiences is not uniform throughout the text. It was less so in the earlier chapters, of which the passage under discussion forms part.

The structure of the *Chandogya Upanisad* is somewhat peculiar. It is by no means a compact text discussing one central theme. Rather, it is a body of loosely jointed or even disjointed discussions of various subjects. The abruptness with which these discussions begin and end gives us the impression that these were originally like independent beads later strung together without too strong a connecting thread.

[97] *Ch Up* v. 3. 6. [98] *Ib.* v. 3. 7.
[99] This remains to be argued by us in ch. v.

But there is one distinct theme that runs through all the sections of the first two chapters of the text. It is the theme of speech, song and melody. After the close of the second chapter, the *Upanisad* returns to this theme only occasionally and that, too, in a rather casual manner.[100] This itself suggests that the first two chapters of the *Upanisad* probably formed its original core; the other chapters could have been later additions. So the memory of the archaic experiences could be retained there in a less distorted manner.

It will be objected that certain other chapters of the *Upanisad,* too, have a running subject matter. It is concerning the nature of the real self, a subject-matter usually looked at as characteristic of the Upanisadic thinking as a whole. We find this being discussed in the *Chandogya Upanisad* not only in a comparatively larger number of places but also with greater zeal and deeper interest.

This is true. Yet this other theme is neither distinctive of the *Chandogya Upanisad* nor has it any relevance to the circumstance of this *Upanisad* being appended to the *Sama Veda.* Besides, the significance of the name *Chandogya* should not be ignored. For though the names of the *Upanisads* do not necessarily have any bearing on the theme discussed, yet the relevance, where it exists, should not be overlooked. The name *Chandogya* is derived from the word *chandoga.*

> *Chandoga* means '*chandas-singer,*' and *chandas* combines in itself the meanings 'magic-song,' 'sacred text' and 'metre.' The fundamental meaning of the word must be something like 'rhythmical speech'; it might be connected with the root *chand,* 'to please, to satisfy, or to cause to please.'[101]

If the authors of the text meant to discuss in it primarily the questions concerning the nature of the real self, there is no reason why they should have called it *Chandogya.* But if they meant to discuss primarily the questions concerning the magic songs, then the earlier chapters of the text formed its original core and, as such, were older than the rest. It is no wonder, therefore, that we should be able to understand these more directly in the light of what is already known in general about the primitive peoples.

[100] E.g. iii. 12. 1; iii. 17. 3.
[101] Winternitz HIL i. 168 n.

16. Desire and Song

It is not necessary for our purpose to try to explain all the points discussed in these earlier chapters of the *Upanisad*. We are going to concentrate, rather, on those topics that have a direct bearing on the passage under consideration. For we are trying only to argue that far from being satirical, the strange scene of the chanting dogs was meant to reveal what the authors of the *Upanisad* really thought to be the essence of Vedic chanting.

Said the *Chandogya Upanisad*:[102]

> The essence of a person is speech.
> The essence of speech is the *Rik* ('hymn').
> The essence of the *Rik* is the *Saman* ('melody').
> The essence of the *Saman* is the *Udgitha* ('loud chanting').

That is, there is no speech which is not poetry, there is no poetry which is not a melody and there is no melody that is not chanted loudly—and all these are vitally related to human existence.

The relationship between speech, poetry and song, as conceived here, is, a persistent feature of ancient Vedic thought.

> The Vedic theologians, however, conceive the relationship of melody and stanza in such a way that they say, the melody has *originated* out of a stanza. The stanza (*Rik*) is, therefore, called the *yoni*, that is, the womb, out of which the melody came forth.[103]

This has naturally appeared strange to the modern scholars[104] because it is far from our current notions concerning the relation between poetry and melody. However, this will not appear to us to be very strange if we try to understand it in the way in which we have tried to understand 'the dogs' of our passage, that is, in the light of our knowledge of the primitive peoples.

> The common speech of savages has a strongly marked rhythm and a lilting melodic accent. In some languages the accent is so musical, and so vital to the meaning, that when a song is composed the tune is largely dictated by the natural melody of the spoken words.[105]

That is, the *Riks*, among the primitive peoples, are the *yonis* of the *Samans*, or, there is no *Rik* which is not also a *Saman*, just as there is no speech which is not also poetry (*Rik*).

> Thus, the common speech of these savages is rhythmical, melodic, fantastic to a degree which we associate only with poetry. And if their common speech is poetical, their poetry is magical. The

[102] i. 1. 2.
[103] Winternitz *op. cit.* i. 165.
[104] *Ib.*
[105] Thomson SAGS i. 439.

only poetry they know is song, and their singing is nearly always accompanied by some bodily action, designed to effect some change in the external world—to impose illusion on reality.[106]

The last point brings us to another well known characteristic of ancient Vedic singing. The songs were supposed to be accompanied by well defined movements of hands.

When singing, the priests emphasize these various notes by means of movements of the hands and the fingers.[107]

Burnell,[108] in his introduction to the *Arseya Brahmana* of the *Sama Veda* has tried to discuss this peculiarity of Vedic chanting. Yet we are left to wonder at the mysterious meaninglessness of all the details, because serious efforts are not made to understand these from the point of view of the gesticulations as forming an aspect of primitive speech.

Savages, like children, gesticulate when they talk. The function of gesticulation is not merely to help others to understand. They gesticulate just as much when talking to themselves.... For us, speech is primary, gesticulation secondary, but it does not follow that this was so with our earliest ancestors.[109]

But let us return to the *Chandogya Upanisad*. We have seen that in ancient society, speech, poetry and music are in a state of primordial complex, yet to be dissolved into the multiplicity of these collateral activities. That upon which the complex thrives is of course magic: the illusory technique of presenting the desired reality as if it were actually present. The core of magic is thus a desire—the desire that is meant to be fulfilled fantastically. We do not, naturally, expect the authors of the *Chandogya Upanisad* to know of any song that is not for the purpose of fulfilling a desire, or, of a singer who is not at the same time a procurer of desires.[110] The desire is primarily that of food, as in the case of our chanting dogs.

Then it (i.e., breath) sang out food for itself, for whatever food is eaten is eaten by it. Hereon one is established.
Those gods said: 'Of such extent, verily, is this universe as food. You have sung it into your own possession. Give us an aftershare in this food.

This occurs in the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*.[111] But it occurs there in the context of a story which is also to be found

[106] *Ib.* i. 440.
[107] Winternitz *op. cit.* i. 167.
[108] xxviii, xli-xlviii.
[109] Thomson SAGS i. 445-6.
[110] *Ch Up* i. 2. 13: *kaman agayati.*
[111] i. 3. 17-8.

in the *Chandogya Upanisad.*[112] Deussen[113] conjectured that the *Brihad Aranyaka* version of the story was older. But that is doubtful. *Udgitha* being the central theme of the story, it is particularly relevant to the *Chandogya Upanisad*. Besides, the idea of song for the purpose of fulfilling a desire was definitely the persistent theme of the *Chandogya Upanisad*. We shall quote a few examples:

An effective singer of desires, verily, indeed, becomes he who, knowing this thus, reverences the syllable as the *Udgitha*.[114]

Therefore an *Udgitha*-singer who knows this may say: 'What desire may I win for you by singing?' For truly he is lord of the winning of desires by singing, who, knowing this, sings the *Saman*—yea, sings the *Saman!*[115]

'Let me obtain immortality for the gods by singing'—thus should one obtain with his singing. 'Let me obtain oblation for the fathers by singing, hope for men, grass and water for cattle, a heavenly world for the sacrificer, food for myself (*atman*)'—one should sing the *Stotra* carefully, meditating these things in mind.[116]

'Which one is the *Rik*? Which one is the *Saman*?
Which one is the *Udgitha?*'—Thus has there been a discussion.

The *Rik* is speech. The *Saman* is breath (*prana*).
The *Udgitha* is this syllable *'Om.'*

Verily, this is a pair—namely speech and breath, and also the *Rik* and the *Saman*.

This pair is joined together in this syllable *'Om.'*

Verily, when a pair come together, verily, the two procure each the other's desire.

A procurer of desires, verily, indeed, becomes he who, knowing this thus, reverences the *Udgitha* as this syllable.

Verily, this syllable is assent; for whenever one assents to anything he says simply *'Om.'*

This, indeed, is fulfilment—that is, assent is.

A fulfiller of desires, verily, indeed, becomes he who, knowing this thus, reverences the *Udgitha* as this syllable.[117]

Now then, the fulfilment of wishes.
One should reverence the following as places of refuge....
Finally, one should go unto himself and sing a *Stotra*, meditating carefully upon his desire.

[112] i. 2.
[113] SUV 69.
[114] i. 2. 14.
[115] i. 7. 8.
[116] ii. 22. 2.
[117] i. 1. 4-8.

Truly the prospect is that the desire will be fulfilled for him, desiring which he may sing a *Stotra*—yea, desiring which he may sing a *Stotra*![118]

If the authors of the *Upanisad* actually thought all these then our modern scholars have obviously no right to think that the dogs of our passage, since their song was meant only to fulfil the desire for food, were just mocking at the Vedic priests. On the contrary, the point is, however much removed these authors were from their own ancestors, they were still looking at the magical efficacy of the songs largely in the manner in which their ancestors did. That is why, they did not know of any song that was not for the purpose of fulfilling a desire.

This desire was primarily that of food. But it could as well have been the desire for making rain, multiplying the cattle or kindling the fire. We shall quote a few examples:

The preceding wind is a *Himkara*.
A cloud is formed—that is a *Prastava*.
It rains—that is an *Udgitha*.
It lightens, it thunders—that is a *Pratihara*.
It lifts—that is a *Nidhana*.
It rains for him, indeed he causes it to rain, who, knowing this thus, reverences a five-fold *Saman* in a rainstorm.[119]

Himkara, Prastava, etc., we have seen, were the five divisions of the five-fold *Saman*. The point to be noted is that the underlying belief in the rain-making magic is still preserved in its purity among the surviving savages. What follows is an example of the belief in the magical efficacy of the *Saman* for fulfilling the desire for the increase of cattle.

In animals one should reverence a five-fold *Saman*.
Goats are a *Himkara*.
Sheep are a *Prastava*.
Cows are an *Udgitha*.
Horses are a *Pratihara*.
Man is a *Nidhana*.
Animals come into his possession, he becomes rich in animals, who, knowing this thus, reverences a five-fold *Saman* in animals.[120]

There is obviously an element of arbitrariness in this piece of speculation. Being later speculations on the archaic experiences these were bound to be often arbitrary. But that is not our point. What we are concerned with is the ancient belief underlying the speculation.

[118] i. 3. 8, 12. [119] ii. 3. [120] ii. 6.

More examples are not necessary. Winternitz has already drawn our attention to the ritual book of the *Sama Veda*, 'which is a regular hand-book of magic, in which the employment of various *Samans* for magic purposes is taught.' However, what our scholar did not explicitly say is that such employment of the *Samans* for magical purposes could not have been mere inventions of the Vedic priests. The authors of such texts were only trying to rationalise the beliefs that came down to them from their own ancestors.

17. Speech, Metre and Magic

One obvious reason why the scene of the singing dogs has so easily been taken to be a satirical one is that the idea of singing for the sake of food has appeared to our refined scholars to be very crude. It *is* crude. However, where they err is in taking the ancestors of the authors of the *Upanisad* to be refined people which they were not. They were rather hungry savages frightened of starvation, death, extinction. That is why, speech, metre, song, melody—everything was imagined by them to have the magical efficacy of obtaining food.

The *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*[121] tells the following story of the birth of speech:

> In the beginning nothing whatsoever was here. This (world) was covered over with death, with hunger—for hunger is death. . . .
>
> He desired: 'Would that a second self of me were produced!' He—death, hunger—by mind copulated with speech (*vak*). That which was the semen, became the year. Previous to that there was no year. He bore him for a time as long as a year. After that long time he brought him forth. When he was born, Death opened his mouth on him. He cried '*bhan!*' That, indeed became speech.
>
> He bethought himself: 'Verily, if I attack him, I shall make the less food for myself.' With that speech, with that self he brought forth this whole world, whatsoever exists here: the hymns (*rik*), the formulas (*yajus*), the chants (*saman*), the metres (*chanda*), the rituals (*yajna*), men, cattle.
>
> Whatever he brought forth, that he began to eat. Verily, he eats (*ad*) everything: that is the *aditi*-nature of *Aditi*. He who knows thus the *aditi*-nature of *Aditi*, becomes an eater of everything here: everything becomes food for him.

So the authors of the *Upanisads* were not after all so touchy about the crude idea of food. The same *Upanisad* declared:

> This whole world, verily, is just food and the eater of food.[122]

[121] i. 2. 1, 4, 5.   [122] i. 4. 6.

And again:

He who knows the support of the *Saman* is indeed supported. Voice, verily, is its support, for when supported on voice the breath sings. But some say it is supported on food.[123]

What deserves specially to be noted is that in spite of all the mystifications and obscurities in these statements, the original connection of speech and food was not entirely forgotten. Speech, like melody, was conceived magically to be an aid to obtain food. It was this magical efficacy of speech which the authors of the *Chandogya Upanisad*, too, were trying to rationalise in various ways.

Speech yields milk—that is, the milk of speech itself—for him, he becomes rich in food, an eater of food, who knows thus this mystic meaning (*upanisad*) of the *samans*—yea, who knows the mystic meaning![124]

It was not an isolated thought in the *Chandogya Upanisad*. It occurred again and again. Thus,

Speech yields milk—that is, the milk of speech itself—for him, he becomes rich in food, an eater of food, who, knowing this thus, reverence a seven-fold *Saman* in speech.[125]

Again,

Speech yields milk—that is the milk of speech itself—for him, he becomes rich in food, an eater of food, who knows and reverences these syllables of the *Udgitha* thus: *ud, gi, tha*.[126]

However, the authors of the *Chandogya Upanisad* made it quite clear that the speech they were speaking of was not the common speech. Rather, it was the accentuated speech of the savages, and, therefore, metrical. As a matter of fact, there was to them no speech (*vak*) which was not in metres (*chandas*). As is only to be expected, the *chandas* or metres were conceived to have the same original function. Said the *Chandogya Upanisad*:

Verily, the gods, when they were afraid of death, took refuge in the three-fold knowledge (i.e., the three *Vedas*). They covered (*acchadayan*) themselves with metres. Because they covered themselves with these, therefore, the metres are called *chandas*.[127]

So the gods—i.e., the forefathers of the Vedic peoples—were afraid of death. The *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*[128] already told us that death meant hunger. They took shelter under the *chan-*

[123] i. 3. 27.
[124] i. 13. 4.
[125] ii. 8. 3.
[126] i. 3. 7.
[127] i. 4. 2.
[128] i. 2. 1.

das or the metres. There was obviously only one way in which the *chandas* could offer shelter to the gods against hunger and extinction. It was by opening the sources of food. That is, the metres, too, were once connected with the activity of obtaining food.

We find the memory of this lingering in the later Vedic texts in various ways. The better known of the early Vedic metres were *Gayatri, Usnih, Brihati, Pankti,* etc. And the *Aitareya Brahmana* said:

> *Gayatri* verses should he use as the invitatory and offering verses of the *Svistakrit,* who desires brilliance or splendour; the *Gayatri* is brilliance and splendour; brilliant and resplendent does he become who knowing thus uses *Gayatri* verses. *Usnih* verses should he use who desires life; the *Usnih* is life; he lives all his days who knowing thus uses *Usnih* verses. *Anustubh* verses should he use who desires the heaven.... *Brihati* verses should he use who desires prosperity and glory; the *Brihati* is prosperity and glory among the metres; verily, prosperity and glory he places in himself who knowing thus uses *Brihati* verses. *Pankti* verses should he use who desires the sacrifice.... *Tristubh* verses should he use who desires strength; the *Tristubh* is force, power, and strength; possessed of force, power and strength does he become who knowing thus uses *Tristubh* verses. *Jagati* verses should he use who desires cattle; cattle are connected with *Jagati;* he becomes possessed of cattle who knowing thus uses *Jagati* verses. *Viraj* verses should he use who desires proper food; the *Viraj* is food; therefore he who here has most food is most glorious in the world; that is why the *Viraj* has its name (the glorious).[129]

Many more passages like this may be easily found in the Vedic literatures. But it is not necessary to quote many. The point is that the *chandas,* like the *vak* and the *saman,* were meant to fulfil some desire, however, arbitrary might have been the connection in these later speculations between the particular *chandas* and the particular desire it meant to fulfil. That is, the *chandas,* too, were conceived to have magical efficacy. So our chanting dogs were not very far from the real Vedic path in designing a song specifically meant to fulfil a desire.

18. Song in the Rig Veda

That the chanting dogs of the *Chandogya Upanisad* were strictly following the original Vedic path—that, in other words, the scene depicted before Baka Dalbhya was designed to represent the ancient wisdom of the Vedic sages,—is further evidenced by an analysis of the role of songs in the *Rig Veda.*

[129] Keith RVB 110.

In the sixth *mandala* of the *Rig Veda* we find the following addressed to Indra:

—Then take thy seat with us amidst the *gana* and *sing that we may obtain food,*—we who are singing.[130]

Gana meant the group, and we shall see in the next chapter, that it meant specifically the collectivity characteristic of the tribal society. So the early Vedic poets, themselves living in *ganas,* wanted food. For the purpose of obtaining it, however, they were singing a collective song. And they were requesting Indra to join the chorus. This is most remarkable, because this is precisely what our chanting dogs of the *Chandogya Upanisad* said and did: *annam no bhagavan agayatu asanayam va iti.*

By common acceptance the oldest stratum of the *Rig Veda* embodies the *mandalas* from the second to the seventh. As is to be expected, we find the idea of song-for-the-sake-of-food repeatedly occurring in these portions. Following are some examples:

(O Agni!) thou *with those songs bring the wealth attended with food;* we shall serve thee with our service.[131]

That Indra inspired and fulfilled the *desires of the Angirasas expressed in songs for food.*[132]

Through *yajna the seers with desire got the cows with songs* from the giver of water (Indra); *sitting together with harmonious tunes* they attained wealth, wishing to protect the cows in praise of Indra.[133]

The singers go round thee (Indra) telling about food in all seasons; they sing like the *sama*-singers in both the metres *Gayatri* and *Tristubh* and please the hearer.[134]

Agni increased much with the songs of the singers.[135]

[130] vi. 40. 1.
[131] ii. 6. 1.
[132] ii. 20. 5.
[133] ii. 21. 5.
[134] ii. 43. 1.
[135] iii. 5. 2.

The Agni Vaisvanara, being realised as such in mind, *we invoke with songs in the yajna, being desirous of food and wealth.* He is bountiful, with a chariot he comes to the places of *yajna*.[136]

And so on. Many more passages like these may be quoted from the older stratum of the *Rig Veda*. In all these we find the song to be invariably a group-song and also meant to fulfil an essentially materialistic desire,—usually the desire for food.

It is interesting to note that in spite of all the changes that took place in the lives of the Vedic peoples during the long period that separated the earliest stratum of the *Rig Veda* from its latest stratum, the idea of the song-for-the-sake-of-food did not disappear. Presumably, the memory of the magical efficacy of the songs were carried forward to the poets of later times, and they tried to echo it, though sometimes with modifications characteristic of their times.

Following are some examples from the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*:

The *havih* offering placed on the *kusa*-grass and the *songs make thee (the Asvinas) come to us with food* in accordance with our wish.[137]

Moreover, O Asvins, the rain-givers, the *song of thy shining body nourishes us* in the house sprinkled with these types of *kusa*-grass; it gives us rain and gladdens man by thy gifts, as the cow gives milk.[138]

O Marutas, this panegyric is for thee; this song came to us who respect thee and melt thee (to charity), that we may know the food, as the spoils of victory, and meant for the (nourishment of the) body.[139]

This last hymn occurs four times in the first *mandala* of the *Rig Veda*. Obviously, great importance was attached to it. Of course we find in this the old magic-motive being largely mixed up with the new prayer-motive. The explanation is presumably to be found in the circumstance that it was a product of later times, i.e., of altered social conditions. What is significant, however, is that the magic-motive did not fully disappear even

136 iii. 26. 1. 137 i. 117. 1. 138 i. 181. 8.
139 i. 165. 15; i. 166. 15; i. 167. 11; i. 168. 10.

from the latest stratum of the Vedic compositions. Song was still looked upon as the fulfiller of some desire. Sayana, in his commentary on the hymn quoted last, made this point quite clear: Having addressed the panegyric to Maruta, a wish is expressed for the desired object.

What deserves specially to be noted again is the starkly materialistic character of the wish involved. There is nothing in it of the nature of spiritual values—of heavenly bliss or of liberation (*moksa*). It is simply a desire for food and the food is simply meant for the nourishment of the body.

This is obviously the instinctive materialism, or, proto-materialism of the primitive peoples and even the later Vedic poets were yet to outgrow it. We come across the same instinctive materialism among the chanting dogs of our Upanisadic passage. By placing the highest value on the material means of subsistence,—by singing only of food and of eating and of drinking,—these chanting dogs were, again, sticking strictly to the original Vedic path.

We shall, in Chapter VIII, return to discuss the question of the instinctive materialism of the early Vedic outlook. Meanwhile, it is interesting to observe that from the standpoint of this instinctive materialism, the Vedic outlook, in its original form, was surprisingly similar to the Lokayatika one.

19. Folk Culture and Vedic Culture

We now propose to understand the peculiarity of the Vedic culture in its original form from a very unconventional point of view, that is, from the point of view of the folk-culture still surviving in our country.

We have previously argued, in connection with the totemic survivals, that our backward peoples, because of their stunted development, still exemplify in many ways the beliefs and practices of the early ancestors of the Vedic peoples. There is nothing mysterious about it. These early ancestors were themselves backward people.

We are now going to argue that because of the same or similar reason, certain elements of our folk-culture may have some light to throw upon the earlier phases of the Vedic culture, upon which the authors of the *Upanisads* were speculating, though in their own way.

We shall confine ourselves to the questions of poetry and

song, because that will be specially relevant for our present argument.

To the Upanisadic thinkers, a song was invariably for the purpose of fulfilling a desire and a singer was but a procurer of desires. This was so, because the fulfilment of some desire was the essence of the songs as experienced by their early ancestors. We shall now proceed to see how the same belief underlies the *vratas* of Bengal. These are folk-rituals, often seasonal, performed more particularly by peasant women.

We are indebted to Abanindranath Tagore for his remarkable monograph on the *Vratas of Bengal.*[140] We shall broadly follow here his treatment of the subject, avoiding it only on points where his idealistic preoccupations have obscured the subject.

The nucleus of a *vrata* is a desire.[141] Clustering round it are rhyme, riddle, song, dance and even pictorical representations called the *alpanas.* All these are meant to represent the desire as if it were already fulfilled. As Abanindranath has put it:

> A *vrata* is just a desire. We see it represented in the pictures; listen to its echo in the songs and the rhymes, witness its reactions in the dramas and dances; in short, the *vratas* are but desires as sung, the painted desires, desires as moving and living. [142]

All this is clearly magic. That is, it would be a mistake to call them religious. Abanindranath[143] has repeatedly said that the *vratas* are neither prayers nor propitiations. The attitude underlying the performance of a *vrata* is essentially an active one. It is not the attitude of prostrating oneself before the gods and begging some favour of them. It is rather the attitude of fulfilling the desire through certain definite actions. In fact the concept of the other world or heaven is alien to the *vratas.* Of course, some of the *vratas,* as we find them today, are but religious hotchpotches. But, as Abanindranath has insisted, these are either cunning devices of recent origin or just contaminations with later ideas.[144] In any case, these are not genuine *vratas.* The really genuine ones, as he poetically says, are 'attuned to the music of the earth.'[145]

One element of the *vrata* is that it must be done collectively, by a number of persons participating in the same desire. The desire of an individual and the actions designed to fulfil it cannot

[140] *BV* (B). Quotations to follow are free renderings.
[141] *Ib.* 1. [142] *Ib.* 58.
[143] *Ib.* 11. [144] *Ib.* 7. [145] *Ib.*

constitute a *vrata*. It becomes a *vrata* only when a number of persons cooperate to produce the same effect.

It may be possible for an individual to perform a dance but not a drama. Similarly, it may be possible for an individual to pray and propitiate; but not to perform a *vrata*. Both prayer and *vrata* are designed to fulfil the desires. However, the first is confined to the individual and it culminates in begging for the desire to be fulfilled; the latter is essentially collective and it ends in actually fulfilling the desire.[146]

The peasants of Bengal perform the *vasu dhara vrata*.[147] It is during the mid-summer drought, when, as the *vrata*-rhymes describe it, 'the Ganga is sunken and the sky but a heap of ashes.' Naturally, the *vrata* is designed to fulfil the desire for rain, for plenty of water. The peasants sing. They sing of the shower and in the song they see the scorched earth submerged and the children swimming merrily. And they also act. They create the rain. They hang a jar on the tree, fill it with water and bore holes in it. The jar is the cloud. Water drips from it. It rains. That is how they enact in fantasy, the fulfilment of the desired reality.

We shall confine ourselves to the role of the songs as forming part of these rituals.

The question is: Do the songs in this *vasu dhara vrata*—the songs in which the desire for rain is represented as if it were actually fulfilled—really create rain? Obviously not. Nevertheless, these songs are not futile. For the midsummer drought is long and appalling; it is by far the severest trial in the lives of our peasants. And the sight of rain which they see in the songs, —of land submerged and children swimming merrily—though not a 'material reality' is certainly a 'psychological reality'.[148] That is, the songs assure the peasants and lead them to overcome the feeling of helplessness before a hostile nature. This is how magic, though an illusory technique, is an aid to the real technique.

The early ancestors of the Vedic peoples, too, sang their songs. And these songs were meant to fulfil their desires. And it helped them to survive: the songs saved the gods from hunger and extinction, the *chandas* offered them the shelter. So when the dogs of our Upanisadic passage were hungry like these early gods, they wanted to have a song. It was a song for the sake of

[146] *Ib.* 11. [147] *Ib.* 57.

[148] The terminology is Freudian, though Freud himself (*Totem & Taboo*) was far from a materialistic understanding of primitive magic.

food. Their behaviour, therefore, was not very much different from that of the peasants of Bengal who still perform the *vasu dhara* and other *vratas*.

Of course, these peasants are not primitive people. How in their cultural life this primitive element still survives as a living force is, naturally, a complex question. We shall raise it in the next chapter. Meanwhile, we may note the remarkable point to which we have already arrived. The Lokayata tradition has an unexpected light to throw on the obscurities of the Vedic tradition. For Lokayata, as we have seen, meant the beliefs and ideas of the people, the crude mob, as Samkara contemptuously called them. It was, in short, another name for folk culture.

But Lokayata also meant the this-worldly outlook,—proto-materialism, as we have called it. And it has indeed been remarkable of Abanindranath Tagore to have drawn our attention to the fact that the early Vedic songs resemble the *vrata*-songs from this point of view, too. The *vratas*, he has rightly said, could not have been derived from the *Vedas*; the two were aspects of two distinct cultures. So he has attributed the *vratas* to the pre-Aryans. Yet the *vrata*-songs are remarkably similar to the Vedic songs:

> The world with which both the Aryans and the pre-Aryans concerned themselves was this earth in which they were actually born. The desires of both were to have in this very earth wealth, crop, luck, health, longevity and other essentially this-worldly objects. This is obvious from the nature of the desires underlying the songs of both.[149]

How do we account for this remarkable similarity? Abanindranath has really suggested the method to answer the question. For he has actually proposed to understand the peasant *vratas* by appealing to the knowledge about the American aborigines.[150] If this be valid and if, further, the similarities between the *vrata*-songs and the early Vedic songs be really fundamental, then the obvious implication is that we may try to understand the obscurities about the latter, too, in the light of the knowledge of comparative anthropology. Unfortunately, Abanindranath himself has not faced the full implication of this argument. Nevertheless, we may follow him closely for there are other interesting points to recover from his observations.

How old are the *vratas*? According to Abanindranath, these

[149] Tagore *op. cit.* 6. [150] *Ib.* 21 ff.

are old—very old in fact—certainly older than the *Puranas*[151] and may even be older than the *Vedas*.[152] Yet the *vratas* were distinct from the *Vedas,* in spite of all the similarities that we may observe between them. The desires behind the Vedic songs were *characteristically masculine* while those behind the *vrata* songs are *characteristically feminine*:

> The desires of the male and the desires of the female,—the Vedic rituals were of the men, the *vratas* of the women,—that is all the difference between the two.[153]

This is significant. However, there is another difference between the nature of the two which, though equally significant, has not been emphasised by our author. Both were designed to fulfil certain desires—the desire for plenty and for security; yet the objects meant to ensure these were not of the same nature.

The Vedic singers dreamt of cattle and more cattle:

> The principal means of livelihood to the Vedic Indian was cattle-breeding. His great desire was to possess large herds; and in the numerous prayers for protection, health, and prosperity, cattle are nearly always mentioned first.[154]

But the women performing the *vratas* in our villages are primarily concerned with the crop. In fact, the largest majority of the *vratas* are, directly or indirectly, based on the desire for the success of the agricultural operations. Agriculture, by contrast, had only a secondary importance in the lives—and therefore also in the songs and rituals—of the Vedic peoples: 'at the time of the hymns agriculture as yet played only a small part.'[155] Assuming, therefore, that the *vratas* were pre-Aryan in origin we may conclude that the culture of these pre-Aryans was basically characterised by the agricultural elements which were the affairs of the women.

Had the pastoral economy of the Vedic peoples anything to do with their characteristically masculine ideas? Had the agricultural economy of the pre-Aryans anything to do with their pronouncedly feminine ideas? We shall see more of these later. For the present we may remember that we have come across this same fundamental difference while considering the *vamacari* ideas in the previous chapter: the ritual sexuality of the Lokayatikas formed part of the matriarchal-agricultural context while

151 *Ib.* 6. 152 *Ib.* 9. 153 *Ib.* 6.
154 Macdonell HSL 166. 155 Winternitz HIL i. 64.

in the Vedic literatures it belonged to the pastoral-patriarchal context.

20. Recapitulation

To recapitulate: The chanting dogs were no more real dogs than their performance was really a satire on the Vedic priests. They were just primitive people and their performance was meant to impart the knowledge of Vedic chanting to a certain person called Baka Dalbhya.

The *Chandogya Upanisad* said:

> Baka Dalbhya knew it. He became the *Udgitha*-singer of the people of Naimisa. He used to sing to them their desires.[156]

We are, of course, not told whether the scene of the chanting dogs he was made to witness gave him this wisdom. Perhaps it did. For the knowledge in question was that of singing the desires. And what he was made to witness was nothing but this.

This is how we have tried to explain, in broad outlines, an apparently obscure passage of the *Chandogya Upanisad.* Our argument has been that what is obscure in our ancient literatures may be the survival of very archaic belief and as such can possibly be understood in the light of what is already known in general about the surviving primitive peoples. The general principle on which this argument is based is that these communities of the surviving primitive peoples 'reflect the spiritual conduct of our ancestors thousands of times removed.'[157]

21. General Principle

This principle was first scientifically formulated by Morgan. He spent the greater part of his life among the American aborigines. His study of them 'is a pioneer work of field anthropology and a masterpiece of its kind.'[158] And it was on the basis of this that he reconstructed 'the prehistoric foundation of our written history in its main features.'[159]

He observed that all the primitive peoples were not living in the same stage of social development.

> As it is undeniable that portions of the human family have existed in a state of Savagery, other portions in a state of Barbarism,

[156] i. 2. 13.
[157] Morgan AS epigraph.
[158] Thomson SAGS i. 87.
[159] Engels OF 10.

and still other portions in a state of Civilization, it seems equally so that these three distinct conditions are connected with each other in a *natural as well as necessary sequence of progress*. Moreover, that this sequence has been historically true of the entire human family, up to the status attained by each branch respectively, is rendered probable by the conditions under which all progress occurs, and by the known advancement of several branches of the family through two or more of these conditions.[160]

Therefore,

The remote ancestors of the Aryan nations presumptively passed through an experience similar to that of existing barbarous and savage tribes. Though the experience of these nations embodies all the information necessary to illustrate the periods of civilization, both ancient and modern, together with a part of that in the later period of barbarism, their anterior experience must be deduced, in the main, from the traceable connection between the elements of their existing institutions and inventions, and similar elements still preserved in those of savage and barbarous tribes.[161]

Concluded Morgan:

In studying the condition of tribes and nations in these several ethnical periods we are dealing, substantially, with the ancient history and condition of our own remote ancestors.[162]

Morgan argued this in 1877. Since then, immense progress has been registered in the field of archæology, creating greater possibilities of reconstructing the pre-historic foundation of written history. Yet, this progress has not minimised the importance of Morgan's argument.

Archæology deals with the material remains of the extinct man. But it does not directly tell us anything about their social organisation, nor about their beliefs and ideas. This gap may be filled up by ethnology.

Since Morgan's time, new materials have also been collected in the field of ethnology, necessitating, as we shall see, modifications of some of Morgan's conclusions. But his basic argument remains valid. Unfortunately, however, full advantage of this has not been taken by our modern scholars of pre-history.

Thomson has argued in defence of this comparative method. He has also provided the necessary caution.

Childe asks whether we should assume that,

... because the economic and material culture of these tribes has been arrested at a stage of development Europeans passed through some ten thousand years ago, their mental development stopped dead at the same point?

[160] Morgan AS 3. Italics added.
[161] *Ib.* 7-8.
[162] *Ib.* 18. Italics added.

Thomson agrees that the answer should be in the negative. But he adds that the 'problem cannot be left there.'

It is true that the institutions of these modern tribes have continued to develop, but these have developed

only in directions determined by the prevailing mode of production. This is the key to the problem. If, for example, we examine the Australian forms of totemism, exogamy, and initiation, and compare them with similar institutions elsewhere, we find that they are extraordinarily elaborate, pointing to a long period of development. But these are all institutions characteristic of a simple hunting economy. In other words, just as the economic development of these tribes is stunted, so their culture is ingrown. And consequently, while we cannot expect to find such institutions in palæolithic Europe in the same form, we are likely to find them there in some form.[163]

Besides, there are the questions of special features resulting from external influences.

It must never be forgotten that the primitive peoples surviving today are known to us only to the extent that they have been penetrated by our own traders, missionaries, government officials, and ethnologists. In some cases they have been converted outright into proletarians, like the Bantus in the South African goldfields; in others their native institutions have been arbitrarily stabilised as an instrument of indirect rule by the British Colonial Office. Such cultures must of necessity present special features due to the abrupt nature of their contacts—features which can only be explained after a methodical analysis of the effects of capitalist exploitation.[164]

Concluded Thomson:

With these reservations the comparative method is an instrument of which we can and must avail ourselves if we are intent on the advancement of our subject.[165]

Morgan, like Marx, is thought of as outmoded and consequently discarded. But it is not necessary for us to enter into the general question of how far his observations still remain valid. Thomson has already discussed the point and, in fact, with more competence than any other known to us. He has also indicated where and how, because of evidences gathered by subsequent anthropological work, Morgan's conclusions are in need of modification. It may therefore be useful for readers, before relying too exclusively upon the critics of Morgan, to go through Thomson's criticism of them.

However, we may mention here one special point about Thomson's reply to the critics of Morgan. Such criticisms are

[163] Thomson SAGS i. 34-5.
[164] *Ib.* i. 35-6. [165] *Ib.* i. 36.

not always the results of the objective evidences. There is often something more than this. It is the general resistance of our academic world to his findings.

For, just as a modern scientist studying the primitive peoples is but a civilized man, 'the historian of the past is a citizen of the present.'[166] That is, the ideas, beliefs and values of contemporary society are very much likely to influence the basic outlook of both the scientist and the historian, though not necessarily consciously. Therefore, not only the primitive view of life was relative to the primitive society, but also our view of the primitive life has the distinct possibility of being relative to our society. We live on private property, we have our values of morality and we are accustomed only to patrilineal descent. Saturated as our general outlook is by all these, we are often likely to see them even where they do not really exist.

The professed objectivity of the social scientists and the historians, therefore, if taken in an absolute sense, will only be an illusion. This does not mean that there cannot be degrees of objectivity. But the degree of objectivity will depend upon the capacity to criticise our own preoccupations. Thus a champion of the *status quo* will have a lesser chance of understanding the primitive peoples or the conditions of our own remote ancestors compared, for example, to a socialist, who is a critic of the *status quo*.

This brings us to what Marx[167] called *'a certain judicial blindness.'*

Even the best minds absolutely fail to see—on principle, owing to a certain judicial blindness—things which lie in front of their noses. Later, when the moment has arrived, one is surprised to find traces everywhere of what one has failed to see. The first reaction against the French Revolution and the Enlightenment bound up with it was naturally to see everything as medieval, romantic; even people like Grimm are not free from this. The second reaction is *to look beyond the Middle Ages into the primitive age of every nation, and that corresponds to the socialist tendency,* although those learned men have no idea that they have any connection with it. Then they are surprised *to find what is newest in what is oldest*—even equalitarians, to a degree which would have made Proudhon shudder.

To show how much we all labour under this judicial blindness: Right in *my own* neighbourhood, on the *Hunsrücken,* the old Germanic system survived up till the *last few* years. I now remember my father talking to me about it from a *lawyer's* point of view! Another proof: Just as the geologists, even the best, like Cuvier, have expounded certain facts in a completely distorted way,

[166] Thomson AA 2. [167] Marx & Engels SC 242.

so philologists of the calibre of a Grimm *mistranslated* the simplest Latin sentences because they were under the influence of Möser (who, I remember, was enchanted that 'liberty' never existed among the Germans but that 'the air makes the serf') and others. For example, the well-known passage in Tacitus: *Arva per annos* mutant et *superest ager,*' which means: they exchange the fields, *arva,* (by lot, hence sortes in all the later Leges Barbarum) and common land (ager as ager publicus contrasted with arva) remains over—is translated by Grimm, etc: they cultivate fresh fields every year and still there is always (uncultivated) land left over!

We shall have, in course of our study, repeated occasions to realise the profound significance of what Marx meant by 'finding what is newest in what is oldest.' But at the moment the question of the judicial blindness only. We shall have plenty of examples of this, too, in the modern works on our ancient culture. We may mention here only a few interesting examples.

The *Mahabharata*[168] described a people called the Vahikas, In this context the epic said:

Therefore, their sister's sons rather than their own sons become their successors.

We have here obviously a reference to the indirect matrilineal succession, as is still exemplified by the Khasis and the Iroquois. But the medieval commentator Nilakantha explained it as follows:

Since they produce their children in the womb of their sisters rather than in their wives, their sister's sons succeed them.

We cannot obviously expect Nilakantha to interpret this indirect matrilineal succession on the basis of the comparative method. But we expect him not to make such grotesque inventions and impose these on the ancient text. However, he had to do it. Because he was trying to understand the mode of succession described in the text on the basis of the only mode known to him and accepted by his society: succession can only be from the father to the son and as such, since among the Vahikas the sister's sons are the successors, they must have somehow or other been real sons as well, though born in the womb of the sisters. That is, he was suffering from a judicial blindness. But have the modern scholars, who are evidently better situated than Nilakantha as far as the availability of the ethnological data are concerned, shown a greater freedom from this judicial blindness? Unfortunately not. We may mention only one example here.

168 *Karnaparva* xxxiv. 119.

In the *Chandogya Upanisad*[169] we find a village referred to as the Ibhya-grama, the village of the Ibhyas. *Ibha* means elephant; therefore *ibhya* literally means the descendant of the elephant. From the point of view of totemism, the clearest implication is that the villagers were the descendants of the elephant-clan. People belonging to the elephant-clan were quite well known in ancient India; we find the Ibhyas being mentioned in the *Rig Veda*[170] as well as in the ancient Buddhistic literature.[171] Presumably they were still in a backward stage during the time of the *Upanisad,* for in the story of the *Chandogya Upanisad*[172] we find them treated as degraded people. The same sense of degradation is to be found in the reference to the Ibhyas as a low caste in the fifth Asoka edict.[173]

However, this straightforward meaning has escaped the traditional commentators of the *Upanisad* as well as the modern scholars. Samkara[174] tried to interpret the name Ibhya to mean the elephant-riders and he showed considerable grammatical ingenuity for the purpose. We understand his difficulty. The concept of totemism was not available to him. However, the persistent misinterpretation of the name which we come across in the writings of the modern scholars cannot be understood except as instances of what we are trying to characterise as 'judicial blindness.' Here are a few examples. Geldner[175] has taken it to mean vassals rich enough to maintain elephants, Radhakrishnan[176] has followed him and rendered Ibhya-grama as 'village of the possessor of elephants.' Hume[177] dropped the elephants altogether and took Ibhya-grama simply to mean 'village of a rich man.'

This is how the ancient texts are misunderstood if interpreted from the point of view of our contemporary notions and preoccupations. Therefore, the proper method should be to try to understand these in the light of what is already known in general about the primitive peoples surviving today.

Thus alone can we hope to reconstruct our past.

169 i. 10. 1.
170 i. 65. 7.
171 *Ambattha Sutta.*
172 i. 10.
173 Kosambi ISIH 102.
174 On *Ch Up* i. 10. 1.
175 Kosambi ISIH 102.
176 PU 353.
177 TPU 186.

BOOK II

The Social Background

CHAPTER THREE

GANAPATI

STUDIES IN TRIBAL HERITAGE

Lokayata, as implied by the name itself, had been the world-outlook of the people. Therefore, it is only logical for us to begin with an enquiry into the history of the Indian people. To be fruitful, this enquiry has to take into account two factors: uneven development and tribal survival.

> The scheduled tribes form a considerable section of the total population of India. According to the Census of 1951 they number 19.1 million. Out of every 1000 Indians, 54 belong to the tribal community.[1]

Again,

> The tribal peoples live in different economic stages ranging from food-gathering and hunting through shifting cultivation to settled plough cultivation. The Birhor, Korua and Hill Maria depend on food gathering and hunting for their livelihood. The Baiga, Pauri (hill) Bhuiyan, Juang and Kutia Kandh are shifting cultivators. The Munda, Santal and Oraon depend primarily on permanent plough cultivation for their living. The Naga have developed a system of terraced cultivation with elaborate means of irrigation by aqueducts.
>
> In social organisation also there is a wide range of variation from tribe to tribe. The matriarchal Garo and Khasi co-exist with the patriarchal Munda, Santal and other tribes in India. Some tribes like the Onge go about practically naked, whereas tribes like the Bhuiyan and the Gond have regular dresses.[2]

This is uneven development. And one of the basic points that we are going to argue in this chapter is that this uneven development had been a very important feature of Indian social history from remote antiquity. India witnessed the rise of the State in the Indus Valley at least five thousand years ago. This must have been on the ruins of the tribal organisations, though our historians are yet to tell us exactly how the process operated.

[1] A 99. [2] *Ib.* 24-5.

At the same time the tribes persisted by the side of the early states, as they have persisted throughout Indian history and as they do even today. Obviously, we cannot overlook the tribes and yet hope to understand the history of the Indian peoples. Unfortunately, however, our historians have largely ignored the tribes.

Referring to the Indian tribes, Guha,[3] one of our eminent contemporary anthropologists, has said that 'there can be no doubt that India's civilization, as it stands today, has been enriched by the gift of many traits which it received from them.' As we shall see, such gifts of traits were, moreover, usually the survivals of the tribal past of the civilized peoples themselves.[4] That is, these were not necessarily borrowed or adapted from their tribal neighbours, as our scholars are so fond of thinking.[5]

This brings us to the second point of our argument in this chapter. We are going to argue that because of reasons which need to be carefully investigated into, tribal elements have always strongly survived in the social fabric, and therefore also in the beliefs and ideas, of the Indian masses—that is, even of those that have left the tribal stage behind. So we cannot ignore the tribal survivals and yet hope to understand the cultural history of India. Unfortunately, however, our historians have not paid sufficient attention to this question of tribal survivals.[6]

1. Why Ganapati?

There are many difficulties in trying to plunge directly into questions of social history of India, particularly of the ancient period. As is well known, we have abundant data from the religious and mythological point of view, but hardly much from the point of view of social history proper. So we propose to begin from a different end. If it is true that religious ideas are ultimately conditioned by concrete material factors, it should be possible for us to discover something about these material factors by examining the religious ideas in which these are re-

[3] *Ib.* 38.

[4] The hypothesis of absorption examined by us in Ch. I, sec. 12, tends to overlook the circumstance that even the so-called advanced Aryans had an aboriginal past.

[5] Sen *BS* (B) Intro.: this free exchange of ideas and beliefs is an evidence of the grace of God.

[6] Cf. Kosambi ISIH 20-31.

flected.[7] As Marx[8] said, 'the reality of the past seems reflected in mythological fantasy.' We may, therefore, examine the mythological fantasy in order to arrive at the ancient reality.

Let us begin with the story of the birth of a god. And as we are interested primarily in the problem of the Lokayata, i.e., the world-outlook of the people, we should select that god whose name has particularly been associated with the people of the country. He is Ganapati, meaning the deity of the people.[9]

There are many reasons because of which we have selected the story of Ganapati. It will give us some idea of the tribes of ancient India and it will also throw some light on the question of how the state might have emerged in ancient India on the ruins of the tribal organisation. Further, it is not without interest from the philosophical angle either. For Ganapati was not always a god—at least not so in the modern sense of the term—nor was he always favourably looked at by the ancient mythmakers and law-givers. He became a god only eventually and the process which raised him to the status of a god was but an ideological reflection of the process which ushered in the state-power and human relations based on the individual ownership of property. To put it rather schematically: just as the state-power emerged on the ruins of the pre-class primitive communism, so also the spiritualistic ideas emerged in the human consciousness on the ruins of the primitive pre-spiritualistic ideology. Ganapati, indeed, leads us to presume that the nature of this pre-spiritualistic ideology was materialistic or at least proto-materialistic, that is, Lokayatika, in the sense in which we have understood it.

But Ganapati is not the only god in our pantheon. If, therefore, the process of the emergence of the spiritualistic values, as we are trying to understand them, be valid, the same should, in outline, explain the history of the birth of the other gods, too.

This is true. Instead of Ganapati, therefore, we could have traced the story of some other god—of Siva or Krisna, or even that of the ancient Vedic god Brihaspati, with whose name our tradition has always associated the materialistic outlook in ancient India, however ingenious might have been the later myths by which the strangeness of this association was sought to be covered up.

[7] Thomson AA 38. [8] Engels OF 170. [9] Gupta *SS* (B) 144.

But there are many advantages in following the trail of Ganapati. Materials concerning his pre-deistic phase are, on the whole, more numerous. And these directly connect him with the questions of the tribal organisation. For, Ganapati meant the chief of the *gana,* and *gana,* as we shall see, meant the tribal collective, though the word has often been misunderstood by our modern scholars.

Besides, the story of Ganapati is fairly typical. By peculiar ambiguities in Indian mythology, the name Ganapati was also the name of Siva,[10] and even that of Brihaspati himself. This identity of Ganapati and Brihaspati is traceable to as far back as the *Rig Veda.*[11] Even the *Aitareya Brahmana*[12] said that the Vedic *mantra 'gananam tva,'* etc. was addressed to Brahmanaspati or Brihaspati.

This raises an interesting point. If there be really anything in this tradition, that is, if Brihaspati had really something to do with the materialism of ancient India, and if, as the Vedic literatures indicate, Ganapati and Brihaspati had originally been names interchangeable, and if, further, the name Ganapati had been rooted in the *gana,* are we not led to presume that there was some connection between the primitive pre-class society and the materialistic outlook of the ancient times?

In any case, Ganapati lures us to enter the field of ancient Indian philosophy. For his connections with the philosophical views were many.

Wilson[13] mentioned *gana* as the name of a sect of philosophy or religion. Some idea of the nature of this philosophy may possibly be obtained from indirect evidences.

Ganapati had many alternative names. Two of these were Lokabandhu and Lokanatha—the former meaning the friend of the people, the latter their protector. What is specially suggestive is the word *loka,* the people. For Lokayata, too, was so called because it was prevalent (*ayata*) among the people (*loka*). Lokabandhu's connection with the Lokayata views may not, therefore, be very remote.

But a review of the fragmentary remains of the Lokayata leads to the presumption that it was at least closely related to Tantrism. Do we find Ganapati connected with Tantrism in any way? We do, and in fact in more than one way. He enjoys

[10] Monier-Williams SED 343.
[11] ii. 23. 1.
[12] Keith RVB 122.
[13] Monier-Williams *op. cit.* 343.

over fifty appellations in the Tantrika literatures. Besides, Anandagiri's *Samkara-Vijaya*[14] described many sects of the Ganapatyas, i.e., of the followers of Ganapati. Of course, the sect that particularly interests us is that of the followers of Ucchista Ganapati. Anandagiri's description of them does not differ very much from that of the Lokayatikas described by Gunaratna, ritual promiscuity being a very prominent feature of both. In fact, Anandagiri told us in so many words that the followers of Ucchista Ganapati were but *vamacaris*, i.e., Tantrikas.

These connections of Ganapati with the philosophical views of ancient India or, more specifically, with the materialistic trend in ancient Indian philosophy, may be indirect and, at times, remote. However, these are not unreal. And we shall probably understand the proper significance of all these if we can reconstruct, at least in broad outline and even tentatively, the strange history of Ganapati—the *lokabandhu* or *lokanatha*.

2. Meaning of Ganapati

The myths about Ganapati are very complex. But the literal meaning of the name is quite simple. It is *gana* and *pati*, i.e., the chief or protector of the *gana*. How much of strict theological implications was originally attached to this, is a doubtful question. The other equivalent of the same name, namely Ganesa, means *isa* or the deity of the *gana*. But Ganapati was also called Gananayaka and Varahamihira,[15] in the sixth century A.D., meaning the head of an assemblage or corporation.' Besides, there is hardly anything like our conception of god in the use of the name Ganapati in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* or even in the *Rig Veda*. Monier-Williams[16] said that Ganapati, in these texts, only meant the leader of a class or troop or assemblage. Mahidhara,[17] in his commentary on the *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, long before Monier-Williams, interpreted the name simply to mean *gananam ganarupena palakam*, that is, one who protects the *ganas* or the groups. The Tantrika literatures[18] gave the final verdict on the point, by using simply *gana* as one of the fifty possible appellations of Ganapati or Ganesa. Wilson,[19] probably on the basis of this, also said that *gana* was one of the names of Ganesa. There is nothing in the word *gana* to suggest a god.

[14] Ch. xvii.
[15] *BrS* xv.15.
[16] SED 343.
[17] on *VS* xxiii. 19.
[18] *VK* (B) v. 202.
[19] Monier-Williams SED 343.

3. Ganapati as Catastrophe

Interesting though these are in themselves, the most important feature of Ganapati is not to be found in his names. It consists, rather, in a strange transformation of the attitude expressed towards him. From being literally a trouble-maker, he became the custodian of good-will and success. And the story of this transformation is also the story of Ganapati's elevation to the status of a god.

We are accustomed to think that Ganapati was conceived as the deity who bestowed success. But this is an obviously late idea being superimposed on an older one, and the older one viewed Ganapati as catastrophe incarnate. It is traceable as far back as the fifth century B.C., that is, the date usually assigned to the *Grihya Sutras.*

It needs to be remembered, to begin with, that the *Mahabharata,* like certain other ancient texts, conceived of many Ganapatis rather than one. 'Ganesvaras, or Ganapatis, and Vinayakas are here represented as . . . many in number and present everywhere.'[20] And it is needless to add that the Vinayakas mentioned in these texts were the same as the Ganapatis.

These Ganapatis or the Vinayakas inspired only dread and contempt in the days of the *Grihya Sutras.* The *Manava Grihya Sutra*[21] declared that when

> possessed by these a person pounds sods of earth, cuts grass, and writes on his body, and sees in dreams waters, men with shaved heads, camels, pigs, asses, etc., and feels he is moving in the air, and when walking sees somebody pursuing him from behind.

These were psychotic symptoms, considered, in those days, to be the results of being possessed by evil spirits. But these were not the only misdeeds which the Ganapatis caused. The text went on to describe how because of the Vinayakas,

> Princes Royal do not obtain the kingdom, though qualified to govern. Girls do not obtain bridegrooms, though possessed of the necessary qualities. Women do not get children even if otherwise qualified. The children of other women die. A learned teacher qualified to teach does not obtain pupils, and there are many interruptions and breaks in the course of a student. Trade and agriculture are unsuccessful.

In view of the limited possibility of human happiness then existing, the list of calamities could have hardly been more ela-

20 Bhandarkar VS 147.

21 ii. 14.

borate. Ganapati was considered to be evil incarnate. And this attitude to Ganapati must have persisted for a long time. The law book ascribed to Yajnavalkya, separated by many centuries from the *Manava Grihya Sutra,* echoed it.

Yajnavalkya[22] began by saying that the Vinayaka was appointed by Rudra and Brahma to the leadership of the *ganas* (*gananam adhipatye*) to create obstacles.

One possessed by him dreams of getting drowned in water, of men with shaven heads and red garments, of riding on carnivorous animals, of staying amidst the Candalas, asses, camels, etc., of trying to run away from the enemies, but, being unable to do that, falling in the grip of the enemies. He loses concentration, fails to be successful in any enterprise and feels depressed without reasons. Being possessed by Ganapati, the Princes Royal do not obtain the kingdom.

The rest of it is just as in the *Manava Grihya Sutra* quoted.

Between the *Manava Grihya Sutra* and the *Yajnavalkya Smriti,* we have *Manu Smriti.* Manu[23] instructed that those who performed the *ganayaga* should be excluded from the funeral feast. What was meant by *ganayaga*? Govindaraja, the traditional commentator, interpreted it to refer to the ritual of the followers of Ganapati. However, under the influence of the changed attitude to Ganapati, our modern scholars find difficulties in accepting this straight-forward interpretation. They therefore wonder as to what Manu might have really meant. But Manu himself was sharing only the sentiments of his day. A couplet,[24] ascribed to him, describes Ganapati as the deity of the depressed classes, the Sudras, and this in clear contrast to Sambhu, the deity of the Brahmanas, and Madhava, the deity of the Ksatriyas. The Sudras, according to Manu,[25] were entitled to wear only the worn-out clothes and eat only the refuge of food. We do not, therefore, expect him to be reverentially disposed to the followers of Ganapati, the deity of the Sudras. His contempt for *ganayaga* was thus only logical. However, Katyayana,[26] before Manu, gave us an interesting clue to the nature of this *gana yajna.* As interpreted by him, it had hardly much to do with worship as we understand it; it meant a ritual performed collectively by the brethren (*bhratrinam*) and the comrades (*sakhinam*) amongst themselves. We shall see more of this sense of the collective later. For the present, only the earlier view of Ganapati.

[22] i. 271 ff. Free rendering.
[23] iii. 164.
[24] VQ 1931-2. 475.
[25] x. 125.
[26] *KSS* xxii. 11. 12.

It is from the point of view of this early attitude as expressed in the legal or quasi-legal literatures, that certain well known names of Ganapati can possibly be clearly understood. These names are Vighnakrit, Vighnesa, Vighnaraja, Vighnesvara, etc. meaning, literally, the 'trouble-maker.' However, under the influence of later ideas, the literal meaning of these names is often ignored and the modern scholars are generally inclined to view these as meaning the deity who, by presiding over troubles, helps human beings to overcome these and attain success. As Monier-Williams[27] said, 'though Ganesa causes obstacles he also removes them; hence he is invoked at the commencement of all undertakings and at the opening of all compositions with the words *namo ganesaya vighnesvaraya*,' that is, I bow down before Ganesa, the Lord of Obstacles.

The fact referred to is of course true. But it is true under changed conditions, that is, under the changed attitude to Ganapati which developed later. The literal meaning of *vighnakrit*, etc., is 'the creator of troubles.' The legal sources already indicated that this was the original sense. Yajnavalkya, we have seen, said this in so many words: Vinayaka became the leader of the *ganas* in order to create obstacles (*karma cighna siddhyartham*). And the *Dharma Sutra* ascribed to Baudhayana[28] gave the final verdict on the point. Ganapati was called by the simple word *vighna*, that is, trouble.

So, Ganapati meant trouble. The mythological literatures tempt us to go even a step further and view him to have been, in the past, not merely a trouble-maker but a bloody one at that.

Ganapati's elephant-head was said to be left only with one tusk; this explains his name *ekadanta*. And the tusk was supposed to be blood-red. The Tantrika literatures[29] explained the colour as due to the blood stains of the enemies vanquished. But who could the enemies be? The *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*[30] suggested the answer, by way of telling us the thrilling tale of how Ganapati lost his other tusk. There was a fight between him and Parasurama. The latter hurled at him a battle-axe, made by Ganapati's father himself, and this deprived him of one tusk. Not that Ganapati was not equal to Parasurama. For the *Brahmanda Purana*[31] added that Ganapati was 'able enough

[27] SED 343
[28] SBE xiv. 254.
[29] *VK* (B) v. 202.
[30] iii. 40.
[31] Rao EHI I. i. 60.

to resist the blow of the axe; but he did not do so, because he could not bear to see his father's battle-axe pass for a powerless weapon.'

The interesting point of the story is suggested by the nature of Parasurama. He was, as is well known, the most aggressive champion of the priest-class supremacy. Does it mean that Ganapati had for his main enemy the priest-class of his time? The malice which the early priest-class literatures had for him, seems to confirm the suggestion.

The hatred for Ganapati, however, was not confined to the literary sources alone. Gupta[32] has suggested that some of the sculptural representations of Ganapati as a terrifying demon were indications of the early attitude to him. The early sculptures of Ganapati, were indeed of a different nature:

> His clumsy nudity, however, as well as the total lack of jewellery, gives one the impression that he is hardly yet rising from the rank and file.[33]

All this is true. What is far more significant, however, is another series of images of Ganapati which show hostility towards him expressed bluntly and directly.

Stone-images[34] are found in Bengal in which Ganapati figures under the *padmasana* (a sitting posture) of Bhrukuti Tara, or lying prostrate under the lotus-throne of Parnasavari. The circumstance that in the latter, Ganapati is seen to hold a shield and a sword indicates that his surrender was not without resistance. In certain Tibetan bronzes,[35] again, Ganapati is found trampled under the feet of Mahakala. This Mahakala was supposed to be the deity of law and order.

> Yi-Tsing, the Chinese author and pilgrim, relates... that at the doors of the Indian monastaries there was usually the statue of a deity... holding a bag of gold; and this god was called Mahakala.[36]

The Mongolian despot Altan Khan is said to have burnt all other idols in his state in favour of this Mahakala.[37] All these are, therefore, evidences of Mahakala's connection with aristocracy and the ruling class.

Ganapati being trampled under the feet of Manjusree is, again, not a piece of very rare sculpture.[38] Probably more signi-

32 Gupta *SS* (B) 144.
33 Getty G xix.
34 *Ib.* 37-8.
35 *Ib.* 43.
36 Getty GNB 161.
37 *Ib.*
38 Getty G. 43.

ficant than all these is an image found of a certain deity called *Vighnantaka*,[39] literally meaning one who destroys obstacles or conquers troubles. Trampled under his feet, Ganapati could only mean the creator of catastrophes. Nepalese legends confirm this point:

> A *pandit* from Odiyana was performing special rites on the bank of the river Bagmati near Katamudu, in order to attain a certain stage of perfection or *siddhi*. Ganesa, wishing to prevent the pious Buddhist from attaining *siddhi*, put insurmountable obstacles in his way. The *pandit*, unable to perform the required rites, invoked, in great distress, the Buddhist Destroyer of Obstacles, who appeared in the fierce form of Vighnantaka and Ganesa was overcome.[40]

It may be objected that Manjusree, Mahakala and others were after all Buddhist deities. Their contempt for Ganapati, therefore, differed in some important respects from the contempt expressed by authors of the *Manava Grihya Sutra* and *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, the representatives of Hinduism. This is true. But this only shows that Ganapati was once hated by the Buddhists as much as by the Hindus. In any case, he was yet to be raised to the status of a god.

4. From Vighnesvara to Siddhidata

What appears to be most astonishing in the career of Ganapati is that this trouble-maker with his blood-smeared tusk was eventually declared to be the god who sanctioned success. The *vighnaraja* became the *siddhidata*. A wide range of publicity literature was naturally called for to popularise this changed attitude to Ganapati.

Ganesa or Ganapati was made to figure very prominently in the *Puranas*. Lengthy sections of at least two major *Puranas* were devoted only to describe his pomp and glory. These were the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* and the *Skanda Purana*.[41] Hyperboles were freely used. The *Skanda Purana* declared him to be an *avatara*, that is an incarnation of God himself. Another text, called the *Ganapati Tattva*,[42] went a step further and equated him to the Upanisadic Brahman, the all absorbing spiritualistic reality. At least one *Upa-Purana* and one minor *Upanisad* were composed exclusively for the purpose of praising him. These were the *Ganesa Purana* and the *Ganapati Upanisad*. The extravangance

[39] *Ib.*
[40] *Ib.*
[41] *Ganesa-Khanda* of both.
[42] *VK* (B) v. 202.

with which his praise was characterised may be illustrated by the latter. Ganapati was addressed as follows:

> The universe is manifest in thee; earth,
> fire, air and ether.
> Thou art Brahma, Thou art Visnu, Thou art
> Rudra.
> Thou art superior to the three bodies
> (*trimurti*).[43]

What particularly strikes us is the deliberate and planned effort at giving publicity to this glory attributed to Ganapati. The *Ganesa Stotra*[44] of the *Narada Purana* concluded:

> One who copies out this (i.e., the *Ganapati Stotra*) in eight copies and distributes the copies among eight Brahmanas, is sure to attain immediate success in learning and that by the grace of Ganesa.

Ganesa began to appear in Indian sculptures in a new light. Not to speak of being trampled under the feet of anybody else, he began to receive costly ornaments and sophisticated decorations. But, as we shall presently see, there was a peculiar abruptness about this new enthusiasm.

However imposing this new publicity enterprise might have been, certain cracks in it could not be concealed. When we examine these we can see that the whole thing was the result of a clumsy after-thought.

Ganapati, it was declared with amazing abruptness, was the god of wisdom and learning. This must have been in flat contradiction to what the authors of the *Manava Grihya Sutra* and *Yajnavalkya Smriti* had said. For according to both, it was because of Vinayaka that a learned teacher failed to obtain pupils and students had to face all sorts of obstacles and interruptions. The necessity was naturally felt for fabricating myths to justify the new quality so abruptly attributed to Ganapati. So it was said that Ganesa alone was found competent to undertake the supremely difficult task of taking down in writing the *Mahabharata,* as composed and dictated by Vedavyasa. But Winternitz[45] has already shown that this story, though found in some recensions of the *Mahabharata* and because it is not to be found in the other recensions, must have been post-*Mahabharata* in origin. That is, it was a later product of a local genius somehow or other grafted on the text.

43 Getty. G. 5.
44 *Vrihat Stotra Ratnakara.*
45 JRAS xxviii. 147ff.

Another instance. To substantiate the claim for wisdom of Ganapati, it was necessary to attribute to him lofty philosophical discourses. So we come across a later text, called the *Ganesa Gita*, in which Ganesa is made to discuss philosophy. But the text itself was the product of not too ingenious an inventor. For it is verbatim the same as the *Srimad Bhagavat Gita*, only with this modification that the name of Krisna is substituted in it by that of Ganesa.[46]

Ganapati was indeed older than his fame for wisdom and learning. The modern scholars have often overlooked this point and have, in vain, tried to link up the two.

> Ganapati's reputation for wisdom is, I believe, to be attributed to the confusion between him and Brihaspati, who in *Rig Veda* is called Ganapati. Brihaspati, of course, is the Vedic god of wisdom, and is called the sage of sages.[47]

This cannot be a convincing explanation. In the early Vedic literatures, epithets of wisdom were not distinctive of Brahmanaspati alone. Besides, the evidence of the *Manava Grihya Sutra* and *Yajnavalkya Smriti* definitely prove that Ganapati's reputation for wisdom could not have been very ancient. The explanation of Ganapati's fame for wisdom as offered by Monier-Williams[48] is more ingenuous and less credible. He tried to connect the god's wisdom with the size of his head: 'to denote his sagacity (Ganesa) has the head of an elephant.' This is obviously arbitrary. Ganapati's elephant-head has a more interesting story to tell.

5. Conflicting Myths

The trouble-maker turned the custodian of success, had to be provided with some dignified geneology. The authors of the *Puranas* naturally found this a laborious task and the mythological literatures pondered over the story of Ganapati's birth. As Foucher[49] has rightly commented,

> The discrepancies of these tales, even more than their inconsistency, would be enough to prove that they had been invented as an afterthought for the needs of the cause and by less than indifferent scholars.

Scholars like Rao[50] and Kennedy[51] already collected these

[46] Monier-Williams IW 139.
[47] Bhandarkar VS 149. [48] SED 343.
[49] Getty G xxi. [50] EHI I. i. 1ff. [51] HM 353ff.

fables together. We need not go into the details over again. Only one or two interesting examples should be enough for our purpose.

It was sometimes claimed that Ganapati was born of a male without a female,[52] sometimes again of a female without a male,[53] indicating at any rate that his birth as a god was far from being normal. There was moreover a sense of uncleanliness about his origin, which the *Puranas* could not entirely overcome. The typical story[54] is that while playing with the filth of her own body, Parvati gave a queer shape to it, was herself fascinated by the shape, put life into it and called it her son. Another story went a step further. Parvati took the unguents with which she annointed herself and mixed with these the impurities of her own body; then she went to the mouth of the river Ganga and made the elephant-headed *raksasi,* Malini, drink it. As a result, Malini conceived and gave birth to a child; this child was eventually taken away by Parvati.[55] Thus Ganapati acquired his status in the holy pantheon by adoption than by birth.

Even then, his elephant-head remained to be accounted for. This led the mythological literatures into fresh muddle. According to the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana,*[56] Ganesa, shortly after his birth, lost his own head by the sight of Sani; so Visnu, out of mercy for the weeping mother, brought an elephant-head and grafted it on his human trunk. But the *Skanda Purana*[57] would not accept this story. According to it, Ganesa lost his head even before he was born. A certain demon called Sindura, literally vermilion, entered his mother's womb and feasted upon his foetal head. The child when born, had to help himself in the matter of obtaining a head. He beheaded the elephant-demon, Gajasura, and placed its head on himself. It was not explained why the child did have such a special preference for a hideous-looking head like this.

Most ingenious of all was the naturalistic explanation suggested by a South Indian version of *Suprabhedagama*:[58] Siva and Parvati once attempted coition in the elephant-posture and this resulted in the baby with the elephant-head.

Stories connecting Ganesa with Malini, the elephant-headed

52 VQ 1935. 105.
53 Getty G 7.
54 The story occurs in *Skanda Purana*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, etc.
55 ERE ii. 808.
56 *Ib.*
57 *VK* (B) v. 182-3.
58 VQ 1935. 105.

raksasi, or with Gajasura, the elephant-headed *raksasa,* indicate that beneath the thick over-growth of later myths remains concealed the fact that Ganesa originally belonged to the aboriginal stock, the *raksasas* and *raksasis.* Another myth—and it occurs in a number of *Puranas*[59]—appears to have a similar implication. The celestial aristocracy headed by Indra, was alarmed by a rally of inferior human creatures, the Sudras and their women, at the hilly tract of Somanatha, the residence of Siva. The gods appealed to Siva, who, however, refused to stop them. So they approached his wife, Parvati, who, from the filth of her own body, created the lord of catastrophe for the destruction of this popular mobilisation. This myth might have represented a reality, but represented it in an inverted manner. Ganesa, we have already seen, was declared by Manu to be the deity of the Sudras, and there are grounds to presume,[60] that, among the followers of Ganapati, women enjoyed equal status with men. Ganapati could not, therefore, owe his birth to the purpose of stopping the rally of the Sudras and their women. The truth, however, must have been very different. As his name implies, he was originally connected with the popular mobilisation, but rather as its leader than as its destroyer.

Significantly, another name of Ganapati is Dvi-Dehaka.[61] It means the two-bodied one. Ganapati was indeed so. He had two bodies, two beings, two births—the earlier and the later, the profane and the holy, the trouble-maker and the custodian of success. We are more familiar with the latter, because in later times more publicity was given to it.

6. The Transformation

It is possible for us to arrive at a rough idea as to the time when this transformation of *vighnaraja* into *siddhidaṭa* took place.

In Cordington's *Ancient India,*[62] we come across an image of Ganapati in which he appeared in glory and grandeur. This sculpture is assigned to about 500 A.D. and is looked at as one of the earliest in which Ganapati appeared in this new light. Coomaraswamy,[63] too, has pointed to the fact that Ganesa 'does not appear in iconography before the Gupta period'. and, further,

59 Kennedy *op. cit.* 354.
60 *Samkara Vijaya* ch. xvii.
61 Getty G xxiv.
62 Plate xxxix.
63 BMFAB xxvi. 30.

'the figure of Ganesa appears suddenly and not rarely in the Gupta period.' Kane[64] has conjectured that 'the well known characteristics of Ganesa and his worship had become fixed before the 5th or 6th century of the Christian era.' All these agree with the evidence of the *Puranas*. For, though the *Puranas* might have been older, scholars[65] have shown that there was a thorough recasting of the Brahmanical literatures during the Gupta period. Thus we have some idea of the time when Ganesa or Ganapati acquired the status of a god proper. It must have been sometime preceding the Guptas.

We shall now examine certain other characteristics of Ganapati more critically; these may throw some light on how he acquired the status of a god.

The clue is to be found in his elephant-head. We are now accustomed to think that this was his original characteristic. But it was not so.

> The peculiar features of Ganesa, as described in the medieval works, namely, the head of an elephant, pot belly, mouse as *vahana* (conveyance) are entirely wanting in the Vedic literature.[66]

Of course, Baudhayana's *Dharma Sutra* referred to the Vinayaka as *hastimukha vakratandu, ekadanta* and *lambodara*—characteristics which came to be attributed to him in later times. 'But, as Kane[67] has shown, 'this part of the *Baudhayana Dharma Sutra* is of doubtful authenticity.'

On the other hand, we have a series of evidences indicating that before the present conception of Ganapati became a fixed one, there were many Ganapatis, not one. The *Vajasaneyi Samhita*[68] used the name in plural. The *Manava Grihya Sutra* referred to the four Vinayakas, and Yajnavalkya mentioned a multiplicity of them. The *Mahabharata*,[69] too, spoke of the Ganesvaras and Vinayakas in the plural. Bhandarkar[70] conjectured that the four original Vinayakas were in course of time reduced to one.

The different Ganapatis presumably had different features and appearances too. The *Taittiriya Samhita*[71] faintly indicated that they had animal appearances (*pasus*). The Tantrika literatures,[72] however, went a step further and indicated that some of

64 HD ii. 215.
65 Rhys Davids BI 23; Kosambi ISIH 138.
66 Kane HD ii. 213.
67 *Ib*. ii. 214.
68 xvi. 25.
69 Anusasanaparva cli. 26.
70 VS 148.
71 iv. 1. 2. 2.
72 *VK* (B) v. 202.

the Ganapatis had the emblem of the bull, others that of the snake. Of the fifty names assigned to Ganapati in the Tantrika literatures, Vrisabhadvaja and Vrisaketana (both meaning the same, i.e., bull as the emblem) and Dvijihva (the two tonged, i.e., the snake) hold special interest for our study. Like the elephant-head of Ganapati with which we are so familiar, the other animal names of the presumably various Ganapatis indicate their origin in the ancient totemic belief.

That the elephant-head of our familiar Ganapati is an unmistakable mark of his totemic origin is a point that need not be elaborately argued. There is no other conceivable explanation of this feature. Foucher[73] has rightly observed:

When dealing with a therianthropomorphic figure of Ganesa's type, we can easily trace it back to the animal prototype from which it came; and here we plunge into the oldest layer of superstition which our developed minds can grasp; totem worship and agrarian rites.

What is not taken note of is, however, a series of other circumstances. Totemism, in its origin, implies a certain definite social organisation, and, on the admission of all, it is primitive communism. If the elephant-head of Ganapati is a mark of his totemic origin, then his history goes as far back as the primitive community life. We shall presently see that an analysis of the meaning of *gana* confirms this.

It is necessary here to be quite clear about the distinction between totemism and religion. We quote Thomson.[74]

Totemism differs from mature religion in that no prayers are used, only commands. The worshippers impose their will on the totem by the compelling force of magic, and this principle of collective compulsion corresponds to a state of society in which the community is supreme over each and all of its members. So long as the united efforts of the whole community are absorbed in maintaining it at the bare level of subsistence, there can be no economic or social inequality beyond the prestige earned by individual merit. This is still the case in Australia.... The more advanced forms of worship, characteristic of what we call religion, presuppose surplus production, which makes it possible for a few to live on the labour of the many. The headmanship ceases to be elective and becomes a hereditary chieftaincy. The totem is attended with prayer and propitiation, assumes human shape, and becomes a god. The god is to the community at large what the chief is to his subjects.... The further expansion of class privilege fosters an increasing complexity in the divine powers from which it draws its sanction. As the ruling clan extends its authority, it annexes the totem gods of other clans and

[73] Getty G xvi.

[74] SAGS i. 49-50.

absorbs them into its own. The royal totem becomes the god of the tribe or league of tribes, and eventually of the state.

Bearing this in mind we return to the question of Ganapati.

The Ganapatis were detested by the authors of such texts as the *Manava Grihya Sutra, Manu Smriti* and *Yajnavalkya Smriti.* We do not really know who these authors were, excepting insofar as they were the spokesmen or the representatives of the state powers of their times. But tribes persisted by the side of these early states, as they are persisting even today. The hostility and contempt felt by these authors for the Ganaptis can thus be taken as reflecting the attitude of the states towards the tribes. However, the attitude changed, and the spokesmen of the state powers of the subsequent period started to praise Ganapati. These were obviously not the old Ganapatis–the elephant, the bull, the snake–but one distinguished Ganapati, selected from among a multiplicity of totem-symbols and raised to the status of a god. Writers were no longer speaking of the many Ganapatis; they were praising only the Lambodara, Ekadanta, Hastimukha, and this is the Siddhidata with whom alone we are familiar in our time.

The selection of one definite Ganapati from a previous multiplicity of them and the transformation of his nature as well as the attitude expressed towards him, could not be accidental. These demand an explanation. And the only working hypothesis to explain it is that all these were the reflections of the process by which some tribe, originally bearing the banner of the elephant, eventually established its superiority as a victorious state. The old veneration felt by this tribe for its totem was retained, but its nature changed. The totem became a god. Only the name remained.

We may look more closely into the icons of our familiar Ganapati. We find him riding a rat. The huge god using a mere rat to ride upon, does not obviously suggest a judicial selection of transport (*vahana*). Yet there is no real incongruity about it. For the gods did not have the freedom to choose their own transport. It was dictated by the nature of the emblem of the vanquished tribe or clan. That is, the elephants established their victory over the rats; the totem of the former became a god while that of the latter was logically reduced to its servitude.

All these may appear highly conjectural. But the real reason is that our historians have paid little or no attention

so far to the problem of the origin of the states in ancient India. The states were taken for granted. The historians sometimes speak no doubt of the tribes, states and clans in ancient India; but they do not always give us the impression that they want to be very clear about the real significance of these terms. Lastly, no respect at all is shown to the general historical law that the states could emerge only on the ruins of the tribes. Under these circumstances, the hypothesis of Ganesa becoming a god as a result of the elephants assuming sovereignty over the other tribes (including the rats), cannot but appear to be very strange.

At the present stage of historical research, it is obviously not possible to trace the details of the process which led to the godhead of Ganapati. We shall confine ourselves only to two points. First, there is nothing intrinsically impossible about our working hypothesis. Secondly, if a comparative study of the ancient history of the other peoples have any relevance for our understanding of ancient Indian history, this is probably the only reasonable hypothesis on which we can work.

Our hypothesis is not improbable for we actually know of the triumphant elephants establishing state-power in ancient India. Thus, for example, there were the ancient Matangas who left their impress on the early punch-marked coins. Kosambi[75] has suggested that the later Kosalan coinage, when arranged in chronological order, reveals the history of the gradual establishment of the Matanga (elephant) dynasty. That this name Matanga was inevitably a relic of the totemic past can hardly be doubted. But it would be highly conjectural, if not manifestly absurd, to claim that specifically this event of the Matangas establishing their state-power was reflected in the process by which Ganapati became a god. For the Matanga dynasty was presumbaly much older than the time of Ganapati attaining godhead. We have seen that in the evidences available so far, the event of Ganapati becoming a god is to be placed sometimes before the Guptas. On the other hand, judging from the fact that the Buddhist text *Lalita Vistara*[76] characterised king Pasenadi as *matanga cyuti upapannam*,—that is, born of the elephant-semen—it is rightly thought that the Matanga-dynasty is to be placed even before the Mauryas. Pasenadi was the king of Kosala during Buddha's time. So Ganapati's elephant-head

75 ISIH 149.

76 JBBRAS xxvii. 185.

could not possibly be connected with these Matangas. Nevertheless, the evidence of the Matangas is important insofar as it shows that there is nothing intrinsically impossible in the idea of some elephant-tribe eventually establishing a state-power in the ancient days. Besides, these Matangas were not the only elephants to have established a state-power in ancient India; the epigraphic records speak of more. The chief queen of Kharavela, for example, described herself as the daughter of Hastisaha or Hastisimha.[77]

We hear also of the rats or the Musikas in ancient India. It has been conjectured that they were the same as the Musicanis of the early Greek narrators.[78] At least the names are strikingly similar. If this were so, and if we are to trust the Greek narrators, then we may be led to believe that at the time of Alexander's campaign those rats were living a community life, typical of the tribal peoples. The Greek writers have told us about their community life.[79]

Like the elephants of ancient times, these rats, too, had evidently a totemic past; their name itself is a proof of that. In modern India, the rat is not at all an uncommon totem among the surviving tribes.[80] The same might have been true in ancient India; we come across this name in many sources. However, Jayaswal[81] thought that all these referred to the same people:

> The Musikas were a people of the South. The *Mahabharata* mentions them in the company of the *vanavasis* (i.e., forest-dwellers). Their country could not have been far removed from Kalinga, for the *Natya Sastra* (*Circa* 100 B.C .to A.D. 100) describes the Tosalas, the Kosalas, the Mosalas (the Musikas).

Similarly, the *Puranas* mentioned *the strirajya* (i.e. government of women) and the Musikas in the Vindhyan countries.[82]

All these might have referred to the same people as Jayaswal has thought, though the possibility of different tribes being called by the same name is not entirely ruled out. For there is no reason why the rat should be considered as being the exclusive totem-symbol of only one definite people.

Be that as it may. In the context of our present argument, the most important fact about the Musikas is that, we are never told of their establishing any state power. Rather, we hear of

77 Barua OBI 57. 78 Jayaswal HP i .75. 79 *Ib.*
80 Risley PI 793; Thurston CTSI i. 164.
81 JBORS iii. 442. 82 *Ib.*

them as being one of the peoples vanquished by an early state power. Strikingly again, this story of the Musikas being vanquished is to be found in the famous Hasti-gumpha (elephant cave) inscription of king Kharavela of Kalinga. This inscription is dated 160 B.C. Jayaswal, 'who has made the reading, restoration and interpretation of the contents of this important epigraphic record his life's work'[83] has read in the fourth line of the inscription a reference to king Kharavela defeating the Musikas: '(he) destroys the Musika capital,' according to Jayaswal's translation.[84]

Of course, this Hasti-gumpha inscription, in spite of all the important historical researches, still remains obscure. We do not yet know, for example, why did it at all derive its name from that of an elephant. The name is suggestive, though of course we cannot possibly argue that the defeat of the rats inscribed within this elephant-cave, gives us the clue to the origin of Ganapati as a god. For the cave is usually associated with Jaina faith which precludes any connection between this cave and Ganapati. Nor has any relation between the elephant and the king Kharavela been established. Besides, this event of the rats being vanquished took place much earlier than the godhead of Ganapati. Nevertheless, the evidence is significant from the point of view of our argument. It shows that there is nothing intrinsically impossible about the idea of there being a vanquished tribe in ancient India that bore the emblem of the rat.

So there were the elephant-clans in ancient India and there were of the rats, too. We have evidence of the elephants being victorious and we have the evidence of the rats being vanquished. Therefore our hypothesis that the icon of Ganesa with which we are so familiar conceals behind it the history of some elephant-clan establishing its empire, need not necessarily be absurd.

Secondly, it is the only reasonable hypothesis on which we may work, provided of course, we agree to draw lessons from historical parallels. We have specially in mind the researches of Moret and Davy[85] regarding the transition from the tribe to the empire that took place in ancient Egypt. This history is reconstructed by them mainly on the basis of totemic evidences. They have shown, further, that this history of the birth of the state was also the history of the birth of a god.

83 Barua *op. cit.* 3.
84 JBORS iii. 462.
85 FTE 115ff.

Before the formation of the Upper and Lower kingdoms, Egypt was divided into a number of autonomous *nomes*, that is, totemic clans and tribes grouped in villages. Various totems were the emblems and standards of these various *nomes*. Egyptian legends retained the memory of the conquest (by the followers of Horus) of the North by the South, and the subsequent establishment of the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. Moret and Davy have deciphered the legend from a series of ivory and slate palettes carved with pictures of animals in combat, leading to the victory of the Falcon. The animals in these pictures were but the various totemic emblems of the different *nomes*. The combat between them was simply the combat between the *nomes*. The victory of the Falcon was but the victory of the *nome* represented by it. The chief of the Falcon *nome* was Menes; the series of victories of the Falcon over the other animals was thus the representation of the series of the victories earned by Menes.

Menes conquered the rest of the Valley and the Delta, and welded the independent villages and clans into a single state. This was, therefore, the story, told in totemic images, of Menes becoming the king—the story of the transition from tribe to empire. It was also the story of a totem becoming a god. The Falcon became the divine Horus, the Falcon-god of ancient Egypt. Egyptian pictures represent king Menes and the god Horus working in very close alliance.

This history of ancient Egypt, as reconstructed by Moret and Davy, is, of course, clear in details. What is clear is likely to throw light on what is yet obscure. The history of Ganapati is also the history of a totem becoming a god. But it is still obscure. On the evidence of the Egyptian parallels, may we not hope, that the obscurities would be removed when our scholars would proceed to reconstruct the history of the transition from tribe to state in ancient India, which must have taken place in different periods and in different regions? In order to do that, however, they would have to take into account the totemic evidences.

But we may, for the time being, leave the question of the state and go back to the literatures of those peoples, who were yet to be fully acquainted with the state organisation. These are the *Vedas*. As is only to be expected, we find the Vedic *Samhitas* to be only full of the glory for the *ganas* and the Ganapatis.

7. Ganas and Ganapati in the Vedas

The early Vedic people, on the admission of the more serious scholars,[86] were organised in tribes. From the point of view of our argument, therefore, we neither expect them to hate the *ganas* and the Ganapati in the manner in which the authors of the *Manava Grihya Sutra, Yajnavalkya Smriti* and *Manu Smriti* did; nor do we expect them to know the elephant-headed god and all the artificial ways of propagating his glory. On the contrary, if *gana* meant the tribe and if the early Vedic people were themselves living a tribal life, we expect their poets to look at the *ganas* as their own group-organisations and to be full of friendly reverence for their Ganapati, the chief of the *ganas*.

The Vedic poets knew their Ganapati but knew nothing of his elephant-head. This Ganapati was neither the Vighnaraja nor the Siddhidata of the later days. Significantly, these early Vedic poets did not know of the Ganapati apart from the concrete *ganas*, in which they were themselves living.

> We invoke, thee, O Brahmanaspati, thou who art the Ganapati among the *ganas*, the seer (*kavi*) among the seers, abounding beyond measure in food, presiding among the elders and being the lord of invocation; come for thy seat where the *yajnas* are being performed.[87]

This occurs in the second *mandala* of the *Rig Veda*, that is, in the oldest stratum of the Vedic literatures. The tenth *mandala* of the *Rig Veda* was much later, and, as we shall see in Chapter VIII, it reflected a social reality that differed in many ways from the picture of the earlier portions. It is, however, to be noted that even during the days of the tenth *mandala* the love for the *ganas* and the friendly reverence for its chief persisted:

> O Ganapati, take thy seat amidst the *ganas*, thou art called the supremely wise among the seers; nothing nearby or afar is performed without thee. O thou possessor of wealth, extol the great and variegated sun.[88]

This was addressed to Indra. There was a difference between addressing Indra as Ganapati in the tenth *mandala* and addressing Brahmanaspati as Ganapati in the second *mandala*. However, this is a point to which we can return only in Chapter VIII of our study.

[86] E.g. Macdonell HSL 153ff; Winternitz HIL 63; Kosambi ISIH ch. 4.
[87] *RV* ii. 23. 1.
[88] RV x. 112 9.

In the *Rig Veda* itself, we do not come across Ganapati anywhere else. But we hear of the *ganas* rather frequently: along with its derivatives, the word occurs no less than forty-four times in the *Rig Veda.* In most of these, *gana* refers to the group-life of the Maruts. In other cases, the use of the word is more significant for it indicates the group-life of the Vedic poets themselves.

O (All-gods), Let the ever bountiful (*sadaprina*) *yajamanas,* with powerful arms, wishing for gain, kill the enemies with thy help; one attains both the desires and that is why one praises the *ganas* with flattering verses.[89]

O Pusan, thou art renowned even abroad; do inspire the *gana* that it may seek the cows for our gains.[90]

The glow leapt upwards of the resplendent fire, which never dies, whose teeth are sharp and which is protected by the *gana.*[91]

(O Usas), thou, who art high-born and pleased with horses, (we) approach thee for wealth (food) through these *ganas;* may thou distribute profuse wealth (food) among us the desirous.[92]

O Indra, drink the *soma* offered for thy pleasure and hence hold and release the two horses who are thy friends; then take they seat amidst the *ganas* and sing that we may get food,—we who are singing.[93]

This group-life—the *gana*—was characteristic of the early tribal stage. However, such a straight-forward interpretation of *gana* will not be readily accepted. The word has been the source of lots of confusions and contradictory interpretations. The confusions are not all of recent origin. Sayana, for example, gave us five different interpretations of the same word in the context of the five passages we have just quoted from the *Rig Veda.* These are (i) *deva-samgha,* i.e., the group-organisation of the Vedic deities; (ii) *manusya-samgha,* i.e., the group-organisation of human beings: (iii) *yajamana-gana,* i.e., the collective of *yajamanas;* (iv) *samghabhuta,* i.e., forming a group or collective body; and (v) *stotrisamgha,* i.e., the chorus-group.

In any case, *gana* implied the collective or some kind of group-life. No scholar would seriously question it. But it is necessary to raise a further question: What could this group-life be which we find referred to in such an ancient literature?

When it is a question of the *Vedas* and the Vedic peoples, our scholars do not hesitate much in characterising them as but tribal. Even Jayaswal who, as we shall see, was most strongly opposed to interpret *ganas* as tribe thought that

[89] v. 44. 12.
[90] vi. 56. 5.
[91] viii. 23. 4.
[92] v. 79. 5.
[93] vi. 40. 1.

In Vedic times, Hindu society was divided into *Janas*, tribes or nations, e.g., Anus, Yadus, Kurus.[94]

Other scholars, too, have unhesitatingly used the word tribe in describing the social organisation of the Vedic people.

Bhandarkar[95] suggested: 'The Rudras are called *ganas* or tribes and Ganapatis or leaders of tribes'. But he has, argued that the idea of Rudra was suggested to the Vedic poets by the gods of the savage tribes:

Being represented as roaming in forests and other lonely places, the idea of investing him with the skin-clothing of the savage tribes may have suggested itself to a poet. The Nisadas, a forest tribe, are compared to Rudras which fact lends support to this view.[96]

And so Bhandarkar came to the following view concerning the *ganas* and Ganapatis in the Vedic literatures:

Rudra had his hosts of Maruts, who were called his *ganas*, and the leader of these *ganas* was Ganapati. The name Rudra, as we have seen, was generalised and signified a number of spirits partaking of the character of the original Rudra; and so was the name Ganapati generalised and meant many leaders of the *ganas*, or groups.[97]

The implication is that, the Vedic people adapted the idea of the *ganas* and the Ganapatis from the forest tribes. But the evidences of the Vedic literatures are against such an assumption. It is true that in the *Rig Veda* the word *gana* is found to occur most frequently in connection with the Maruts and that the Maruts were strongly associated with Rudra. Nevertheless, there are also a considerable number of cases in which the word has nothing to do with the Maruts at all. Besides—and this goes decisively against Bhandarkar—in the *Rig Veda* itself, Rudra is never called Ganapati. On the contrary, only such exalted Vedic deities as Brahmanaspati, and more significantly Indra, were called Ganapati. In short, in the Vedic literatures the glory of the *ganas* and of Ganapati was original and it could not have been the result of any kind of absorption from the aboriginal tribes.

We have argued this point because there is a tendency among our scholars to explain the *ganas* and Ganapatis of the *Rig Veda* as due to this type of adoption. Mitra[98] has argued:

[94] HP i. 11n. [95] VS 104.
[96] *Ib*. 103. [97] *Ib*. 147. [98] VQ 1935. 105.

As Ganesa was perhaps originally the special deity of the *ganas*—wild Aryan tribes, inhabiting desert wastes, mountains and forests, he was probably in later times affiliated to Pasupati (Sankara) and Bhutapati (Siva); and when he was admitted to the higher Aryan pantheon, various descriptions of his origin were given in the *Puranas*, as necessity arose. These explanations might have taken centuries to grow.

Sen[99] has gone even a step further and has argued that Ganapati was un-Aryan in origin and the Aryans, in order to please the mob-mind, subsequently allowed him to enter their own patheon.

What is clearly overlooked by these scholars is the circumstance that whatever ups and downs there might have been in the career of Ganapati during the post-Vedic periods, we have clear and unmistakable evidences of the glory of the *ganas* and Ganapatis so far as the Vedic literatures are concerned. And there is nothing mysterious in this. Unlike those that in later times claimed to be the inheritors of the Vedic tradition and yet hated the tribal life, the Vedic peoples themselves lived in the tribal societies or *ganas*, and Ganapati was looked upon by them as simply their leader. We may quote some further evidences.

The following are from the *Atharva Veda*:

Oblations to the *ganas*: Oblations to the great *ganas* (*maha-ganas*.)[100]

The *yajna* is well-performed and performed with strength, inasmuch as it is performed by the *ganas*, that are the favourites of Indra and are unimpeachable.[101]

He (Brihaspati), the bounteous and the lorded one, along with the *gana*, vanquished the Asura (Vala) with his roar, by the tactics of separation; he recovered the cattle, which were the producers of milk and butter and were lowing.[102]

Let the *ganas* of the Maruts sing separately for the clouds which roar, and let the rain thus created be sprinkled over the earth.[103]

The *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, too, is not without parallels:

Salute to the *ganas* and the Ganapatis. Salute to the *vraatas* and the *Vraatapatis* too. Salute to the magicians (*gritsa*) and the leaders thereof. Salute to the men of various forms and the *viswa-rupas* as well.[104]

Thou art Ganapati among the *ganas*. We invoke thee. Thou art Priyapati (the lord of the beloved) among the beloveds (*priyanam*).

99 *JB* (B) 64.
100 xix. 22. 16.
101 xx. 40. 2; xx. 70. 4. cf. RV i. 6. 8.
102 xx. 88. 5. cf. *RV* iv. 50. 5.
103 iv. 15.4.
104 xvi. 25.

We invoke thee. Thou art the lord of the treasures (*nidhipati*) among the treasures (*nidhinam*). We invoke thee.[105]

The last was evidently a chorus-song sung by women in course of the performance of the *Asvamedha Yajna*.

The word *nidhi* here may be of some interest. Monier-Williams[106] has shown that it was derived from the root *dha*, meaning 'to deposit' and that in the *Samhitas* it meant store, hoard, treasures. But store or treasure belonging to whom? Mythological and legal literatures of later times retained certain hints from which we may conjecture that these were not originally privately owned. The *Puranas*[107] mentioned usually nine, though sometimes eight, *nidhis*, and they were conceived of as personified. When, however, we examine the names actually assigned to these, their totemic origin leaps before our eyes. The names are: *padma* (the lotus) *mahapadma* (the great lotus), *samkha* (the conch-shell), *makara* (the crocodile), *kacchapa* (the tortoise), etc., etc. The names therefore lead us back to a very dim past—the totemic past. And however humble and meagre might have been the wealth of men at this stage, there could not have been any private ownership of it. This primitive concept of collective wealth—of *nidhi*—came down to the authors of the later legal literatures.[108] They knew that the idea of ownership, as understood in the later times, was incompatible with such wealth. The only way they found open to explain this archaic concept in conformity with their own preoccupations was to say that *nidhi* was that kind of wealth the ownership of which had been destroyed for ever.

The question of property of the early Vedic peoples will be discussed in Chapter VIII. For the moment, we may sum up our argument so far.

Living in tribal societies as they did, the early Vedic poets sang the glory of the *ganas* and of the Ganapatis. During the post-Vedic times, however, the spokesmen of the early state powers detested the tribal societies that surrounded them, and this accounts for their contempt for the *ganas* and for Ganapati. The inheritors of the Vedic traditions, thus, learnt to hate precisely those ideas and institutions which were valued so much by their ancestors. This situation continued for several centuries

105 xxiii. 19. cf. RV ii. 23. 1.
106 SED 548.
107 *Ib.*
108 *VK* (B) x. 126-7.

until some triumphant tribe that assumed state power dragged out the ghost of the old concept of Ganapati and endowed it with new pomp and grandeur. And Ganapati became merely a formal entity of his old self, retaining only an animal-head on the human trunk to remind us of his former existence as the chief of the *gana* or the tribe.

But did the word *gana* really mean the tribe?

8. Jayaswal on the Ganas

References to the *ganas* abound in our ancient literatures beginning from the *Rig Veda*. But the attention of our historians was properly drawn to these only recently, that is, by the second decade of the twentieth century. This resulted in two important works of historical research, namely, Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity* and Majumdar's *Corporate Life in Ancient India,* particularly the former. The latter was published in 1919 and though the publication date of the former was 1924, the author has told us in the introduction that the book was to be published earlier but for certain highly disgraceful events.[109]

These dates are important. For there was something more than mere historical enthusiasm behind these works. As rightly observed,

> The celebrated volume of Jayaswal on *Hindu-Polity* was written with the motive to refute the assertion of the British ruling class that India was unfit for parliamentary democratic institutions, by showing that India had republics and 'self-governing democracies.'[110]

Jayaswal[111] himself noted with gratification:

> The book was cited by Sir Sankaran Nair from the manuscript in his Note to the Government of India's *First Despatch on Constitutional Reforms* (dated 5th March, 1919).

It is no wonder, therefore, that the book should show tremendous enthusiasm to discover in the ancient *ganas* such minute details of parliamentary democracy as seats in the republics, motion, resolution, quorum, whips, votes, votes of absentees, ballot voting, procedure of majority, principle of referendum, basis of franchise and citizenship, judicial representation and laws of republics, etc., etc.; in short, practically everything that our national movement was trying to achieve in those days.

109 Jayaswal HP *pref.* vi.
110 Dange IPCS 3.
111 HP *pref.* vi.

Judging from the enthusiasm with which our nationalist press received Majumdar's book we may infer the same or similar inspiration behind it. The *Modern Review*[112] hailed it as

> a crushing answer to those who are at present struggling to establish against history that self-government is the chartered monopoly of the Western nations.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*[113] was jubilant over the fact that

> the book will furnish the most convincing reply to the reiterated arguments of our Anglo-Indian friends that India was quite unfit for experiment of democratic institutions.

Historical research became an ideological weapon in our national struggle.

We need not underestimate the important role which this ideological weapon played in those days. Nor should we for a moment forget the value and importance of the vast materials concerning the ancient *ganas,* so laboriously and competently collected, particularly by Jayaśwal—a feat of historical research which a scholar of his calibre alone could have performed.

Nevertheless, all these should not make us blind to the limitations of his conclusions—limitations that were clearly the results of the exigencies of the situation that drew his attention to the *ganas*. The demand of our national struggle for a democratic self-governing state in India led our historian to discover such states in ancient India and he thought that *gana* was simply the technical term for it, whereas, as we are going to argue, the word really meant the tribal society, or, as in comparatively later literatures, to the more or less degenerate forms of it. This point is important. For state and tribe are different—the former emerges only on the ruins of the latter.

9. Meaning of Gana

The modern lexicons first. Wilson[114] has collected the following meanings of the word: a flock, a multitude, a troop, a tribe or class, etc. The meanings collected by Monier-Williams[115] are: a flock, troop, multitude, number, tribe, series, class (of animate and inanimate beings), body of followers or attendants, troops or class of inferior deities, a company, any assemblage or association of men formed for the attainment of some

[112] March, 1919.
[113] 20 February 1919.
[114] SD *q.v. gana.*
[115] SED 343.

ends, etc. Macdonell[116] has collected the following meanings: host, multitude, class, troop, retinue, community, association, corporation, etc. Evidentaly, these modern lexicons were drawing on the traditional ones.

So Fleet[117] was right in saying that

The word *gana* is given in Indian lexicons, with many other terms, as primarily, a synonym of *samuha* and *samghata,* of which the radical and leading idea is that of 'a gathering together,' 'a collection.'

On the basis of this he argued that *gana* meant the 'tribe.'

But Thomas objected to this interpretation and there was a long controversy over this between the two scholars in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.*[118] The immediate issue of this controversy was the interpretation of two old inscriptions, dated the fifth and sixth century A.D., in which the words *malava gana sthiti* occurred. Both cited the authority of the Indian scholars in their own favour. Fleet quoted the authority of Bhandarkar,[119] who had already translated *malava gana* as the Malava tribe. Thomas mentioned the authority of Jayaswal, though curiously enough, he wanted to use the word *gana* in a sense substantially different from that of Jayaswal:

Now precisely the evidence required has been supplied by Mr. Jayaswal in the paper to which I have referred, evidence for the use of the world *gana* in a definite political sense, a sense appropriate to the present case, which he renders as 'republic' but which may better be represented by 'governing body' or 'senate' and this is accordingly the only sense which has a title to consideration here. . . . I do not think that in either case the word *gana* would have denoted anything but the governing body of the tribe.[120]

The scholar is unfortunately vague as to what could be the meaning of the governing body of the tribe. The true tribal society is so thoroughly democratic and equalitarian[121] that a governing body, as distinct from the tribe and set over it, is not clearly conceivable, unless of course it means the tribal council. In any case, Jayaswal's own interpretation of *ganas* was different, and at least clear and consistent:

In view of the results of a special study of the republican organisations, I differ from that great scholar (namely, Rhys Davids, who, according to Jayaswal, was 'the foremost authority on the Buddhist

116 S *q.v. gana.*
117 JRAS 1915. 138.
118 1914. 413-4, 745-7; 1915. 138-40, 533-5, 802-4, etc.
119 IA 1913. 161.
120 JRAS 1915. 534-5.
121 Morgan AS 66, 85-6.

literature') when he calls them 'clans.' The evidence does not warrant our calling them clans. Indian republics of the seventh and the sixth century B.C. . . . had long passed the tribal stage of society. They were states, *ganas* and *samghas*, though many of them very likely had a national or tribal basis, as every state, ancient or modern, must have.[122]

Jayaswal being the ablest and most consistent representative of the view we are going to oppose, we shall argue specially against him and in defence of the older view upheld by scholars of no less eminence than Fleet, Monier-Williams, Bhandarkar and Rhys Davids.

The mass of materials collected by Jayaswal decisively prove that the *gana*, insofar as the word stood for some human group, meant primarily some kind of non-monarchical and ultra-democratic organisation. But using this as the premise, we cannot argue that the only conclusion conceivable is that the *ganas* were republican states. For, the tribal society, too, in its purity, is democratic to an extent which even the Greek city-states never attained. More important, however, are the evidences ignored by Jayaswal. These show that the ultra-democratic *ganas* were but tribal societies, or, as in later literatures, only the more or less degenerate forms of these.

Jayaswal began with the evidences of Panini, the grammarian who is usually placed in the sixth century B.C., and he has rightly argued that the large number of rules we come across in Panini regarding the *ganas* 'impresses one with the importance which the contemporaries of Panini attached to the existing republics.'[123]

Panini, dealing with the formation of the word *samgha*, in iii. 3. 86. says that the word *samgha* (as against the regular *samghata*, derived from *han*, iii. 3. 76) is in the meaning of *gana*.[124]

This should simply mean that Panini equated the *ganas* with the *samghas*. And Patanjali,[125] commenting on Panini, said that *samgha* was so called because it was one body, a unity. There is, therefore, nothing in these to exclude the idea of the tribal society or to establish the conclusion that the republican states alone could be the meaning of these *ganas*. But Jayaswal thought that another rule of grammar, which he next quoted from Panini, proved his point inasmuch as this rule implied that some of the *samghas* known to Panini were con-

[122] HP i. 49-50.
[123] *Ib.* i. 33.
[124] *Ib.* i. 27-8.
[125] on *Panini* v. 1. 59.

taminated by caste distinctions. This rule is a complex one and we shall see that even assuming Jayaswal's interpretation of the rule, his conclusion does not follow. Besides, certain other and less doubtful evidences decisively go against the conclusion.

In this rule, Panini[126] referred to certain *samghas*, described by him as the *ayudhajivi samghas* among the Vahikas. Examples of these, as mentioned by the commentators, were the Ksudrakas and the Malavas. According to Panini, words which referred to persons belonging to such *samghas*, were to have a certain suffix, viz. *nyat*. Thus, to denote a person as belonging to the Ksudrakas, the name should have this suffix and should become Ksaudrakyah. Similarly, a person belonging to the Malavas should be called Malavyah. At the same time, Panini said that the rule would be applicable only to words that were specifically non-Brahminical and non-monarchical (*a-brahmana-rajanyat*) in sense. This had led Jayaswal to argue that presumably there were words referring to the Brahmanas and the Ksatriyas who, at the same time, belonged to the *samghas*; or else why should Panini make exceptions like these?

> This points to the stage of a developed, the familiar, Hindu society, as opposed to a tribal stage.[127]

Let us first of all see how the traditional commentators proposed to interpret this rule. Bhattoji asked:

> Why did Panini use the word *samgha* in the *sutra*? The answer is that he wanted to exclude for example, the *samrat* (king) to whom the suffix would not apply; because it (*samrat*) was alien to the sense of *samgha*.... Why was the word *a-brahmana*? To exclude the possibility of the application of the suffix to such substantives as *gopalava*, when it referred to a Brahmana.... The rule applies only to the specific substantive *rajanya*.

At least one point should be quite clear from the above. The commentator was anxious to tell us that the concept of the *samgha* and the concept of *rajanya* were thoroughly incompatible. Therefore it would be hardly permissible to argue that the *samghas* referred to 'a developed, the familiar, Hindu society'; because there were, as a rule, Ksatriyas and Brahmanas in such a society. And how could one at all imagine that the *samghas* represented the familiar Hindu society on the face of the fact that whatever might have been the exact sense of Panini, there is at least no doubt that he meant such cases to be only excep-

[126] V. 3. 114 [127] HP i. 34.

tional after all? To agree with Jayaswal, it would be necessary to imagine that the *samghas* generally or as a rule, had Brahmanas and Ksatriyas in them. That would be exactly the opposite of what Panini actually said.

Besides, it would indeed be even prejudicial to Jayaswal's own view, namely, that the *samghas* were republican rather than monarchical organisations, if his interpretation of the above rule of Panini is taken seriously. As interpreted by him, this rule implied that there were Brahmanas and Ksatriyas in the *samghas*. But the grammatical literatures used the word Ksatriya in the sense of the monarch, the *ekaraja*. As Katyayana,[128] commenting on a *sutra* of Panini, said: the word *ksatriyad* was used in the *sutra* to denote *ekaraja* (the monarch) so that the sense of *samgha* was excluded. We come across the same argument in Patanjali's[129] commentary, too:

> The term *ksatriyad* in the *sutra* indicate *ekarajat*. That is, the sense of monarchy. And why was the word used? To exclude the sense of the *samghas*. Because the suffix under discussion did not apply to substantives denoting the *samghas*.

It is evident from the *sutra* commented upon, that Panini would use the word *janapadas* to mean organisations with Ksatriyas, as contrasted to *samghas* which did not include Ksatriyas.

Thus the *samghas*, as the grammarians knew these, were not compatible with Ksatriyas being there. As such, it is hardly permissible to argue that these revealed the familiar caste-divided society and therefore were republican states rather than tribal societies. And even assuming that according to Panini there were Brahmanas and Ksatriyas in some of the *samghas* or *ganas*, we fail to agree with Jayaswal's view of the familiar Hindu society. For such Brahmanas and Ksatriyas were obviously very far from our usual notion of them. This is evident from the *Mahabharata*.

The *samghas* referred to by Panini belonged to the Vahikas. The same Vahikas were mentioned in the *Mahabharata* and this is how the epic described them:

> The people residing there are called the Vahikas. The lowest of the Brahmanas are also residing there from very remote times. They are without the *Veda* and without knowledge, without sacrifice and without the power to assist at others' sacrifices. They are fallen

[128] on *Panini* iv. 1. 168 [129] *Ib.*

(*vraatyas*) and many amongst them have been begotten by Sudras upon other people's girls. The gods never accept any gift from them.[130]

Again,

Travelling through various countries following various religions, I, at last, O King, came among the Vahikas. There I heard that one at first becomes a Brahmana and then becomes a Ksatriya. Indeed, a Vahika would, after that, become a Vaisya, and then a Sudra and then a barber. Having become a barber, he would then again become a Brahmana. Returning to the status of a Brahmana, he would again become a slave.[131]

But more of the *Mahabharata* evidences later.

There is no doubt that the presumably more advanced *samghas* were showing the early signs of class division during the time of the later grammarians. Patanjali,[132] for example, said that a certain suffix was not to be applied to the slaves (*dasas*) and the craftsmen (*karmakaras*) among the Ksudrakas and the Malavas, implying thereby that there emerged by his time some form of slavery and fixed craftsmanship in these two well known *samghas* of ancient India. Perhaps the tribal structure of the *samghas* was beginning to break down in other cases, too. However, this would not justify the generalised claim that the *samghas* of the grammarians were invariably full-fledged state organisations.

That the *samghas* or the *ganas* of the grammatical literatures originally meant only tribal societies is indicated by the names assigned to some of these. The names are typically tribal, being mostly totemic in origin. The following list would be interesting, though it is by no means exhaustive:

Ksudraka,[133] a kind of gadfly.[134]
Malava,[135] a white flowering *lodhra*.
Vrika,[136] the leopard.
Damani,[137] relating to the Artemisia flower.
Aulapi,[138] relating to a species of plant called the *Udupa*.

The confederacy of the six *Trigartas*,[139] consisting of:

Kaundoparatha, one that sits near the kaunda-*creeper*;
Dandaki, born of *danda*, meaning trunk, tusk or stalk, or, in the masculine, of a horse, and in the feminine, of the plant *Hedysarum lagopodioides;*

130 Tr. Roy viii. 155-6.
131 *Ib.* viii. 156
132 on *Panini* iv. 1. 168.
133 Commentaries on *Panini* v. 3. 114.
134 Monier-Williams SED 331.
135 Commentaries on *Panini* v. 3. 114.
136 *Panini* v. 3. 115.
137 *Ib.* v. 3. 116.
138 Bhattoji on *Panini* v. 3. 116.
139 *Panini* v. 3. 116.

Kraustuki, from jackal;
Jalaki, a spider, etc., etc.
Kapotapakah,[140] the young of a pigeon.[141]
Kaunjayanyah, descended from the *kunja,* meaning a bower or an elephant's tusk.[143]
Parsavah,[144] those with battle-axe.[145]
Bradhnayanyah,[146] from *bradhana,* a horse.[147]
Samivatyah,[148] from *samivat,* those with *sami*-tree.
Aurnavatyah,[149] from *urnavat,* those with cob-web.

The names are interesting and these could hardly be the names of Republican states.

We wanted to deal in detail the grammatical evidences adduced by Jayaswal. For, of all his points these were the strongest. His other arguments are of lesser weight. We may refer here to one or two.

> Again, new *ganas* were founded. Would that mean that *new* tribes were founded? Such a meaning would hardly deserve consideration.[150]

To those who have actually studied the tribes, however, the possibility of new tribes being formed did not appear to be such a *prima facie* impossibility. Here is what Morgan[151] said many years ago.

> New tribes as well as new gentes were constantly forming by natural growth....The method was simple. In the first place there would occur a gradual outflow of people from some overstocked geographical centre, which possessed superior advantages in the means of subsistence. Continued from year to year, a considerable population would thus be developed at a distance from the original seat of the tribe. In course of time the emigrants would become distinct in interests, strangers in feeling and last of all, divergent in speech. Separation and independence would follow, although their territories were contiguous. A new tribe was thus created.

But Jayaswal thought that the *ganas* were founded by certain individuals; and so these could not be tribes. There is, for example, a reference in the *Mahabharata* to a confederacy of seven *ganas* which went by the name of the 'Utsava-Samketas':

[140] Bhattoji on *Panini* v. 3. 112.
[141] Monier-Williams SED 251.
[142] Bhattoji on *Panini* v. 3. 113.
[143] Monier-Williams SED 288.
[144] *Panini* v. 3. 117.
[145] Monier-Williams SED 609.
[146] Bhattoji on *Panini* v. 3. 113.
[147] *Nighantuh* i. 14.
[148] *Panini* v. 3. 118.
[149] *Ib.*
[150] Jayaswal HP i. 29.
[151] Morgan AS 105.

> After vanquishing in war the Pauravas and the mountain-marauders, the Pandava (Nakula) conquered the seven *ganas* called the Utsava-Samketas.[152]

The traditional commentator Nilakantha gave the following note:

> Among the Utsava-Samketas, mutual attachment between the male and the female was sufficient ground for sexual engagement. Marriage system did not exist among them. Sexual life was indiscriminate as among the beasts.

Assuming that Nilakantha was not merely vilifying the *ganas*, that is, he was really drawing upon the ancient tradition, we may argue that the above, if it says anything at all, indicates some form of group-marriage, a characteristic of the pre-state tribal life. The seven *ganas* collectively described as the Utsava-Samketas were, thus, but seven tribes. Jayaswal,[153] however, without any further evidence, and ignoring Nilakantha unceremoniously, argued:

> The Utsava-Samketas were republicans, probably founded by two men, Utsava and Samketa. We may, however, point out that *samketa* is a technical term, denoting an act or resolution passed by a republic, and it is just possible that samketa here originally denoted a state founded by a resolution of the Utsavas.

Apart from the invention of the meaning of the word *samketa*,[154] and apart from the question of the internal consistency of the comment made, it is a feat of fancy to have elevated the seven *ganas* of the ancient text into a state founded by two imaginary men, called Utsava and Samketa. Whatever may this be, it certainly is not history.

10. Uneven Development

The evidences concerning the *ganas* mentioned by Jayaswal are important. But more significant than these are the evidences he had to ignore to prove his thesis.

The Vedic literatures, for example, including its oldest stratum, as we have already seen, contain a fairly large number of references to the *ganas*. It is evidently too much for any serious scholar to argue that the Vedic poets sang the glory of certain republican states of their times. Therefore, Jayaswal

[152] *Sabhaparva* xxvi. 16. [153] HP i. 156.
[154] The literal meaning of the word appears to be 'sexual engagement.' Monier-Williams SED 1126.

found it safe to ignore the *ganas* of the Vedic literatures. He spoke about the tribal societies of the Vedic times. He discussed the question of the *sabha* and *samiti* of the Vedic age, but he preferred to remain completely silent about the *ganas* of the Vedic peoples.

In defence of Jayaswal it may be argued that though the early Vedic people might have been living in tribal societies, and though the word *gana* in the early Vedic literatures might have stood for these, yet, during the period that separated the grammatical literatures from the early Vedic literatures, Indian society did not remain static. So, during the days of Panini, on whose account of the *ganas* Jayaswal depended so much, the Indian people must have advanced far ahead of the tribal and developed state-organisations. It is well known that words change more slowly than their meanings and the old word is often retained to refer to the new realities. Therefore, it is quite conceivable that though the word *gana* meant tribal organisations in the early Vedic sources, it was not bound to mean the same during the days of Panini and after. That is, it may not be improbable that in the new context of the post-Vedic times the old Vedic word *gana* began to mean, as Jayaswal thought, the republican states that must have cropped up by that time.

This argument cannot be valid. However, the rejection of the argument does not at all imply that states were yet to develop in India during the time of Panini and others. As a matter of fact, India witnessed the rise of the state even long before the Vedic age; the material remains of the Indus people are evidences of a sophisticated urban life and centralised state power. Again, as revealed by the Vedic literatures, the Vedic people themselves, in spite of their tribal past, ultimately reached the stage of class division and state organisation. So it would be fantastic to deny that there were states during the days of Panini. What is denied, however, is that the word *gana* ever meant these. The development of social organisations was not homogeneous throughout the whole country. Tribes always persisted by the side of the states. And even in the earlier days, those who had left the tribal stage behind had to use some word to refer to their tribal neighbours. The words they used were *gana, vraata, puga, samgha, sreni.* They did not have to invent these words; these were current among their own ancestors. The grammatical sources reveal that these *samghas* were

non-monarchical. The Greek writers[155] of Alexander's campaign tell that these had formidable power in resisting direct military assault. The Buddhist sources[156] made it clear that these were ultra-democratic in constitution. All these informations understood in the light of the evidences of the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthasastra,* make the picture of the tribal societies complete.

What is really overlooked by our historians is the uneven development of the Indian peoples, a fundamental characteristic of Indian history. What was true of the Indus people was not true of all their contemporaries. There were tribes around the Indus state, and even the Vedic peoples were then at the pastoral stage of the tribal society, measuring their wealth in terms of cattle. This is one instance of uneven development. But the Indus state was destroyed and, it is conjectured, destroyed by the Vedic peoples. These Vedic peoples, too, eventually developed their own state power. The *Brahmanas* are quite clear about it. But the Vedic peoples did not represent the whole of India. Surrounding the centres of these early states, there were large patches of tribal societies, the inhabitants of which were described as demons and devils in the literatures of those days. This is yet another instance of uneven development. The tribal names in the edicts of Asoka are again evidence of the uneven development of his age:

> In the vast slaughter of Asoka's Kalinga war, there is no mention of opposing princes or kings. Elsewhere in the Asokan edicts only tribal names appear. But he mentions by name the contemporary Greek kings Antiochus, Antigonus, Ptolemaios, Magas, Aleksandros; so it is clear that, except for the Mauryan empire, there was no kingship of the type in India at that time.[157]

This feature of uneven development remained a characteristic of Indian history throughout the successive ages, down to the very modern times. It is this uneven development of the Indian peoples that justified, as late as 1881, the author of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* to speak of the 'remnant to our own day of the Stone Age.'[158]

> India thus forms a great museum of races, in which we can study man from his lowest to his highest stages of culture. The specimens are not fossils or dry bones, but living communities, to whose widely diverse conditions we have to adapt our administration and our laws.[159]

155 JBBRAS xxvii. 188.
156 *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya.*
157 JAOS lxxv. 37. 158 Hunter IGI iv. 176.
159 *Ib.* iv. 174.

A still more recent example of this uneven development may be found in the map of tribal India recently prepared by the Department of Anthropology, in 1956.

Bearing this in mind, we may now return to the question of the *ganas*, and discuss those evidences in particular that Jayaswal had to ignore or overlook for the sake of his own thesis.

11. Ganas in Mahabharata

The Vedic singers sang the glory of the *ganas*. These were organisations of their own. In the literatures of the post-Vedic period, too, we come across many a reference to the *ganas*. But there was a characteristic and significant difference in the attitude expressed. They were no longer the organisations to which the authors of these texts had any affiliations. They belonged rather to the aliens, those who were hated and looked down upon. People still living in the *ganas* were considered to be unclean, uncivilised and, significantly, without any sense of marriage morals. The attitude expressed in the *Mahabharata* to the Vahikas, who, according to Panini, were people living in *samghas* or *ganas* may be taken as typical.

In the *Mahabharata*[160] the following is put into the lips of Karna:

In Dhritarastra's abode the Brahmanas used to narrate the accounts of diverse delightful regions and many kings of ancient times. A foremost one among Brahmanas, venerable in years, while reciting old histories, said these words, blaming the Vahikas and the Madrakas: 'One should always avoid the Vahikas, those impure people that are out of the pale of virtue, and that live away from Himavant and Ganga and Sarasvati and Jamuna and Kuruksetra and Sindhu and its five tributary rivers. I remember from the days of my youth that a slaughter-ground for kine and a space for storing intoxicating spirits always distinguish the entrances of the abodes of the (Vahika) kings (chiefs). *On some very secret mission I had to live among the Vahikas.* In consequence of such residence the conduct of that people is well known to me. There is a town of the name of Sakala, a river of the name of Apaga, and a clan of the Vahikas known by the name of the Jarttikas. The practices of these people are very censurable. They drink the liquor called *gauda*, and eat fried barley with it. They also eat beef with garlic. They also eat cakes of flour mixed with meat, and boiled rice that is brought from others. Of righteous practices they have none. Their women, intoxicated with drinks and divested of robes, laugh and dance outside the walls of houses and cities, without garlands and unguents, singing all the while drunken and *obscene songs* of diverse kinds that are as musical as the bray of the ass or the bleat of the camel.

160 Tr. Ray viii. 152-6.

In intercourse they are absolutely without any restraint, and in all other matters they act as they like. Maddened with drink they call upon one another, using many endearing epithets. Addressing many drunken exclamations to their husbands and lords, the fallen women among the Vahikas, without observing restrictions even on sacred days, give themselves up to dancing. One of those wicked Vahikas,—one, that is, that lived amongst those arrogant women, —who happened to live for some days in Kurujangala, burst out with cheerless heart, saying,—"Alas, that (Vahika) maiden of large proportions, dressed in thin blankets, is thinking of me,—her Vahika lover,—that is now passing his days in Kurujangala, at the hour of her going to bed! Crossing the Sutlege and the delightful Iravati, and arriving at my own country, when shall I cast my eyes upon those beautiful women with thick frontal bones, with blazing circlets of red arsenic on their foreheads, with streaks of jet black collyrium on their eyes, and their beautiful forms attired in blankets and skins, and themselves uttering shrill cries. When shall I be happy in the company of those intoxicated ladies amid the music of drums and kettle-drums and conchs, sweet as the cries of asses and camels and mules; when shall I be among these ladies eating cakes of flour and meat and balls of pounded barley mixed with skimmed milk, in the forests, having many pleasant paths, of Sami and Pilu and Karira. When shall I, amidst my own countrymen mustering in strength on the high-roads, fall upon passengers, and snatching their robes and attires beat them repeatedly?"

'What man is there that would willingly dwell, even for a moment, amongst the Vahikas that are so fallen and wicked and so depraved in their practices?'

Having said this, that pious Brahmana began once more to say what I am about to repeat respecting the wicked Vahikas. Listen to what I say:

In the large and populous town of Sakala, a raksasa-woman used to sing on every fourteenth day of the dark fortnight, in accompaniment with a drum: 'When shall I next sing the songs of the Vahikas in this Sakala-town, having gorged myself with beef and drunk the *gauda* liquor? When shall I again, decked in ornaments, and with those maidens and ladies of large proportions, gorge upon a large number of sheep and large quantities of pork and beef and the meat of fowls and asses and camels? They who do not eat sheep live in vain!'

Even thus, O Salya, the young and the old, among the inhabitants of Sakala, intoxicated with spirits, sing and cry! How can virtue be met with among such a people? Thou shouldst know this! I must, however, speak again to thee about what another Brahmana had said unto us in the Kuru court:

'There where forests of Pilus stand, and those five rivers flow, viz. the Satadru, the Vipasa, the Iravati, the Candrabhaga, and the Vitasta and which have the Sindhu for their sixth, there in those regions removed from the Himavant, are the countries called by the name of the Arattas. Those regions are without virtue and religion. No one should go thither. The gods, the *pitris*, and the Brahmanas, never accept gifts from those that are fallen, or those that are begotten by Sudras on the girls of other castes, or the Vahikas who never perform sacrifices and are exceedingly irreligious.'

That learned Brahmana had also said in the Kuru court:

'The Vahikas, without any feelings of revulsion, eat off wooden vessels having deep stomachs and earthern plates and vessels that have been licked by dogs and are stained with pounded barley and other corn. The Vahikas drink the milk of sheep and camels and asses and eat curds and other preparations from those different kinds of milk. Those degraded people number many bastards among them. There is no food and no milk that they do not take. The Aratta-Vahikas that are steeped in ignorance, should be avoided.'

I must, however, again speak to thee about what another Brahmana had said unto me in the Kuru court:

...'There are two *pisachas* in the river Vipasa, named Vahi and Hika. The Vahikas are the offspring of those two *pisachas*. They are not creatures created by the creator. Being of such low origin, how can they be conversant with the duties ordained in the scriptures? The Karaskas, the Mahisakas, the Kalingas, the Keralas, the Karkotakas, the Virakas, and other peoples of no religion, one should always avoid.

'Even thus did a raksasa-woman of gigantic hips speak unto a Brahmana who on a certain occasion went to that country for bathing in a sacred water and passed a single night there. The regions are called by the name of the Arattas. The people residing there are called the Vahikas.... The gods never accept any gifts from them.'

The description of the Vahikas was continued in the next section of the *Mahabharata* and, in course of saying what he claimed to have been told by a learned Brahmana, Karna gave us a very valuable clue as to the social organisation of the people:

In former days a chaste woman was abducted by robbers (hailing) from Aratta. Sinfully was she violated by them, upon which she cursed them, saying, 'Since you have sinfully violated a helpless girl who is not without a husband, therefore the women of your families shall all become unchaste. Ye lowest of men, never shall ye escape from the consequences of this dreadful sin.' It is for this, O Salya, *that the sisters' sons of the Arattas, and not their own sons, become their heirs.*[161]

This is an indirect form of matrilineal succession in which the woman's rights are transferred to her brother. We have living examples of this among the Iroquois of America, the Khasis of India and others.[162] To the Brahmana-reporter, accustomed as he was with the laws of patrilineal succession of his own society, this naturally appeared as a mark of degradation. So he wanted to explain it as the result of some sin. In the same way, those Brahmana reporters were utterly scandalised by the social and sexual freedom of the Vahika women.

But the moral indignation of the Brahmanas reporting on

[161] *Ib.* viii. 156-7. Italics added.

[162] Thomson SAGS i. 154.

the tribal peoples was really ironical. For, their attitude to the tribal peoples, judged by their own standards, were not highly moral. This is evident from Kautilya's *Arthasastra*. We shall presently quote it and see that the *secret mission* of those Brahmanas among the tribal peoples was only the mission of spying in the guise of hermits, of corrupting these peoples with adulterated wine and attractive women—married, unmarried and the professionals. However, there was a more interesting aspect about this moral indignation on which we shall confine ourselves for the moment.

The Brahmanas were so much scandalised by the Vahikas, primarily because of the lack of sexual morals among them. 'In intercourse, they were absolutely without restraint.' Or, as Nilakantha put it, they were indiscriminate like the beasts. This was how the civilized peoples were looking at the man-woman relationship of the surviving tribes of their times. And this is not very much different from how, even some of the modern scholars, have looked at the sexual relationship among the primitive peoples of our times. However, the fact is that what was looked at with such contempt was some form of marriage relationship prior to the monogamian one and monogamian marriage was fully established only with the advent of civilization.

Interestingly, these civilized observers of the *Mahabharata* themselves had a primitive past which, as is only to be expected, was characterised by similar practices. This is evidenced by the *Mahabharata* itself. Here is an example:

> It has been heard by us that there was a great *risi* of name Uddalaka. He had a son of name Svetaketu who was also an ascetic of merit. One day in the presence of Svetaketu's father, a Brahmana came and catching Svetaketu's mother by the hand, told her, *let us go*. Beholding his mother seized by the hand and taken away apparently by force, the son, moved by wrath, became very indignant. Seeing his son indignant, Uddalaka addressed him and said: 'Be not angry, O Son! That is the practice sanctioned by antiquity. The women of all orders in this world are free (lit., uncovered—*anavrita*). O Son, men in this matter, as regards their respective orders, act as kine.' The *risi's* son Svetaketu, however, disapproved of the usage, and established in the world the present usuage as regards men and women.[163]

Again, the following is what Pandu said to Kunti in the *Mahabharata*:

[163] Tr. Ray i. 356.

But I shall now tell thee about the practices of old indicated by illustrious *risis* fully acquainted with every rule of morality.... Women formerly were not immured within houses and dependent on husbands and other relatives. They used to go about freely, enjoying as best liked by them.... They did not then adhere to their husbands faithfully, and yet, O handsome one, they were not regarded sinful, for that was the sanctioned usage of the times. That very usage is followed to this day by birds and beasts without any exhibition of jealousy. That practice, sanctioned by precedent, is applauded by great *risis*. And O thou of tapering thighs, the practice is yet regarded with respect among the Northern Kurus. Indeed, this usage so lenient to women hath the sanction of antiquity. The present practice, however, hath been established but lately.[164]

This very strongly reminds us of Morgan:[165]

We have been accustomed to regard the monogamian family as the form which has always existed.... Instead of this, the idea of the family has been a growth through successive stages of development, the monogamian being the last in its series of forms....it was preceded by more ancient forms which prevailed universally throughout the period of savagery through the older and into the middle period of barbarism; and that neither the monogamian nor the patriarchal can be traced back of the later period of barbarism. They were essentially modern.

To sum up. Among these very Brahmanas, who denounced the tribal peoples as promiscuous like beasts the monogamian form of sexual relationship developed comparatively later. Their forefathers, living as they did in the same or similar stages of social development in which the Brahmanas found the tribal peoples to be, were having the same or similar type of sexual relationship and were even considering these as but *dharma*. The *ganas* or *samghas*, so much hated by the later Brahmanas, were ironically, the very social organisation of their own ancestors, the proud inheritors of whose tradition they at the same time proclaimed themselves to be.

12. Meaning of Vraatya

This last point is important and it may clarify lots of misleading speculations of our modern scholars about ancient Indian social history resulting from a mistaken understanding of another important word, the *vraatya*. We shall therefore go into some details of the meaning and history of this word.

The word occurs in the passage of the *Mahabharata* we have quoted. Karna said, *vraatyanam dasamiyanam devah annam bhunjate*.

[164] *Ib.* i. 355-6. [165] AS 393.

In the translation we have used, *vraatya* is rendered as 'the fallen'. This is an error. But the error is neither uncommon nor without reason. We shall analyse these reasons first.

Like the *Mahabharata,* the legal and ritual literatures did impute a definite sense of uncleanliness and degradation to the persons called the *vraatyas.* According to the *Apastamba Dharma Sutra,*[166] a *vraatya* is one on whom and on whose ancestors the *samskara* of *upanayana* was not performed. The *Paraskara Grihya Sutra* and other *Sutra*-works said the same thing.[167] *Samskara* meant purification, and *upanayana* the Brahmanical form of initiation. At the time of this initiation, one learnt the sacred *Gayatri*-mantra, which was also called *Savitri.* So Manu[168] said that the *vraatyas* were fallen from *Savitri* and as such were outside the pale of the Aryan society. Yajnavalkya[169] held the same view: the *Savitri-patitas* were the *vraatyas.* These people were not to be taught the *Vedas,* nor allowed to officiate in the sacrifices, and social intercourse with them was forbidden.

The *Baudhayana Dharma Sutra*[170] tried to explain the cause of the degradation of the *vraatyas* by using the stereotyped Brahmanical formula: the *vraatyas* were but *varna-samkaras,* i.e., born of the mixture of castes. But the ritual books called the *Brahmanas,* prescribed rituals for upgrading them. Thus the *Tandya Maha Brahmana*[171] described a ritual called the *vraatya-stoma,* which had four different forms. And the *Katyayana Srauta Sutra*[172] said that by performing this ritual the *vraatyas* would cease to be *vraatyas* and would be eligible for social intercourse.

At the same time, the *Tandya Maha Brahmana,* in the context of this ritual gives us some valuable clue as to what the word have originally meant. It tells us a story: when the gods rose up to the heavenly world, some of their dependants were left behind on earth and they were left to live the *vraatya*-life; eventually, however, these dependants received the *sodasastoma* (consisting of sixteen *stotras*) and the metre *anustubh* from the Maruts and with the help of these secured the heaven.

The story could not obviously be true in the way in which it was told. Nevertheless, it appears to contain a very important element of truth. That is, *uneven development was a feature*

[166] i. 1. 1. 22—i. 1. 2. 10.
[167] Kane HD ii. 96.
[168] ii. 39.
[169] i. 38.
[170] i. 9. 15.
[171] xvii. 1-4.
[172] xxii. 4. 27-8.

even of the social life of the early Vedic peoples themselves. Some of them moved forward, while others were left behind to live the *vraatya*-life. And those that moved forward, naturally developed contempt for those that were left behind. For the same *Brahmana* declares that those who led the *vraatya*-life were base because they did not *till the soil nor engage themselves in trade.* Obviously these were questions of technological development rather than mere matters of religious observances.

To derive the meaning of *vraatya* from the point of view of the social development of the ancient Vedic peoples, therefore, seems sensible. Perhaps the literal meaning of the word will throw some more light on the question.

Influenced by the sense of the fallen (*Savitri-patita*), our modern scholars have often tried to derive the word from *vrata*, meaning the ritual. Those who were without the *vratas* or rituals were called the *vraatyas*. But, as Sastri[173] has convincingly shown, there is no conceivable way in which the word *vraatya* could be, from the point of view of strict grammatical rules, derived from the word *vrata* (ritual) to mean those that were without rituals or *vratas*.

Kane[174] has observed that the 'origin of the word *vraatya* is lost in the mists of antiquity.' But it is not necessary to take such a gloomy view. Panini[175] already indicated how the word could be derived from the substantive *vraata*, by adding the suffix *nyah* to it. This suffix was to be added in the sense of 'belonging to' (*svartha*). Thus the *vraatyas* were those who were living in the *vraatas*, who belonged to the *vraatas*.

So the question is: what was meant by the *vraata*? Katyayana[176] said that the words *sreni, puga, gana, vraata* and *samgha* meant the same thing, the radical sense of all these being the group—*samuha*, or *varga*.

So the meanings of *gana* and *vraata* were not different. Interestingly, Sayana [177] tried to make out the same point: 'there is but little difference between the *gana* and the *vraata*.' *Gana*, we have seen, meant the tribal collective. The meaning of *vraata* could not be different.

[173] AV 3. [174] Kane HD ii. 386.

[175] v. 3. 113. Though the commentator Bhattoji wanted to restrict the derivation to words denoting *vraata* (*vrata vaci savdas*), yet there is apparently nothing in the *Sutra* itself to prevent the application of the rule to the word *vraata* as such.

[176] Kane HD ii. 66. [177] On *RV* x. 34. 12.

Accepting, therefore, the derivation of the word given by Panini, we conclude that the *vraatyas* were those that lived in the tribal societies. We may now understand the story of the *Tandya Maha Brahmana*: among the ancestors of the Vedic peoples some reached a higher stage of social development while the others were left behind in the tribal stage, as they did not learn to till the soil or to engage themselves in trade.

At the same time, the *Tandya Maha Brahmana*, like the legal and the ritual literatures, was full of contempt for the *vraatyas*. Here again, we come across the same ironical situation in the Vedic tradition. The authors of all these texts were claiming to be the champions of the ancient Vedic tradition; however, while showing contempt for the *vraatyas* they were also showing contempt for the ancient institutions of the Vedic peoples themselves. If, as *Tandya Maha Brahmana* tells us, some of the Vedic ancestors moved forward leaving others to live the *vraatya*-life, the only inference is that at a still remote age all the ancestors of the Vedic peoples were living in *vraatas*, i.e., were the *vraatyas*.

That this inference is legitimate is evident from the *Samhitas*. When we skip over the *Smritis, Sutras* and the *Brahmanas*, and go back to the more ancient portions of the Vedic literatures, we find the Vedic sages themselves, far from being unfavourably disposed towards the *vraatas* and the *vraatyas*, were singing the glory of these. The best example is the *Atharva Veda*, a full chapter of which is devoted to the praise of the *vraatya*. Following are a few specimens from it.

He (the *vraatya*) arose; he moved out toward the eastern quarter; after him moved out both the *brihat* (i.e., a Vedic metre) and the *rathantara* (antoher Vedic metre) and the Adityas and all the gods; against both the *brihat* and the *rathantara* and the Adityas and all the gods doth he offend who revileth a thus-knowing *vraatya;* of both the *brihat* and the *rathantara* and of the Adityas and of all the gods doth he become the dear abode (who knoweth thus). Of him in the eastern quarter faith is the harlot, Mitra the *magadha* (bard), discernment the garment, day the turban, night the hair, yellow the two *pravartas, Kalmali* the jewel (*mani*), both what is and what is to be the two footmen, mind the rough vehicle, Matarisvan and Pavamana the two drawers (*vaha*) of the rough vehicle, the wind the charioteer, the whirlwind the goad, both fame and glory the two forerunners: to him cometh fame, cometh glory, who knoweth thus.[178]

The *Atharva Veda* goes on to describe how the *vraatya* next

[178] Tr. Whitney 774.

moved to the Southern quarter, and then to the Western quarter and then to the Northern quarter, and always with similar glory.

There was thus, in the *Atharva Veda,* a tendency to express the glory of the *vraatya* in a grand cosmic scale. It found its culmination in the following:

> Of that *vraatya*—
> As for his right eye, that is yonder sun; as for his left eye, that is yonder moon.
> As for his right ear, that is this fire;
> As for his left ear, that is this cleansing one (wind).
> Day and night (are his) two nostrils; *Diti* and *Aditi* (his) two skull-halves; the year (his) head.
> With the day (is) the *vraatya* westward, with the night eastward: homage to the *Vraatya.*[179]

On the basis of all these, it is even conjectured by some[180] of the modern scholars that the *vraatya* of the *Atharva Veda* was comparable to the *purusa* of the *purusa-sukta* of the *Rig Veda* or the Superme Being of the *Puranas.*

The glory of *vraatya* in the *Atharva Veda* naturally created much confusion in the mind of Sayana. Removed, as he was, from the Vedic literatures by a few thousand years and being a great champion of Brahmanism of his time, he wanted to look at the *vraatya* in the manner in which the authors of the ritual and legal literatures did. However, the evidence of the *Atharva Veda* was in flat contradiction to it. He tried to resolve the contradiction by inventing an obviously arbitrary explanation of this. He suggested that this description did not 'apply to all *vraatyas,* but only to some very powerful, universally respected and holy *vraatya*'.[181] There is at least nothing in the text itself to justify such an explanation.

We have seen the same thing with regard to the *ganas* and the Ganapati. The early Vedic literatures were full of glory for both, whereas the later inheritors of the Vedic tradition hated both. And indeed, this parallel is only to be expected. For the *gana* and the *vraata* referred to the same thing—the group-life of the tribal society.

Parallel, therefore, to the glory of the *ganas,* we come across in the *Rig Veda* itself, a peculiar glory attributed to the *vraatas.* In certain verses the two words are used almost interchangeably:

> In every *vraata,* in every *gana,* we desire for the energy of the Maruts and the splendour of Agni with panegyrics. . . .[182]

179 *Ib.* 791.
180 *VK* (B) x. 101.
181 Kane HD ii. 386.
182 iii. 26. 6.

It is to be noted that even in the tenth book of the *Rig Veda* the glory of the *vraata,* like the glory of the *gana,* was not completely lost.

The *vraata* plays with the fifty three of these (dice); he is truthful by nature, like the god Savitri....[183]

We shall return later to discuss the importance of the dice in the primitive society. In the present context it is important to note how in the well known *aksa-sukta* of the *Rig Veda,* not only the words *gana* and *vraata* were used almost interchangeably, but the same glory was also attributed to both. The dice were addressed as follows:

That which has become the leader (*senani*) of your great *gana* and the leading chief (*raja-prathama*) of the *vraata,*—I address him and I declare that I am not withholding wealth; I am stretching out the ten fingers of my arms and am speaking the truth (*rita*).[184]

Obviously, the Vedic poets were too near their own *ganas* and *vraatas* to have learnt to hate these.

13. Kautilya and Tribal Societies

The early *ganas* eventually disintegrated, allowing the states to emerge on their ruins. However, because of uneven development, the early Indian states remained surrounded by, and often included within the field of their domination, extensive areas of tribal societies, despised by the spokesmen of the state powers.

On the religious or quasi-religious plane, this contempt for the *ganas* found its expression as contempt for the Ganapatis or the Vinayakas.

On the ethical or quasi-ethical plane, the same was expressed as contempt for the beliefs and practices in general, of the tribal peoples, and hatred for their marriage morals in particular.

However, by far the sharpest expression of this contempt for tribal societies is to be found in the writings of Kautilya. There are a number of reasons that make his account of the *samghas* very important. First, there is no sentimental fuss about it: his indignation of the tribal societies was neither religious nor moral but essentially practical. Kautilya would not mix up politics with moral scruples. Secondly, there are reasons to believe that the policy attributed to him was in fact the re-

[183] x. 34. 8. [184] x. 34. 12.

cognised state-policy practised in this country for many centuries before and after him. Lastly, his zeal to break up the group-bond of these *samghas* or the tribal societies was most significant.

Spies, entering the *samghas* and discovering jealousy, hatred and other prospects of internal conflicts, should sow the seeds of a well-planned dissension among them. Under disguise of teachers (*acaryas*), they should cause childish embroils among the chiefs. Sharp spies may provoke the chiefs of the *samghas* by praising their inferiors in taverns and brothels. Under disguise of astrologers and others, the spies should give publicity within the *samghas* to the royal marks of the prince; as such the honest leaders of the *samghas* should be led to subservience to the prince, born of this or the other king. To those who are thus prevailed upon, the king should send gifts of cattle, men and other materials. They should be thus won over. On occasions of any affray, spies, pretending to be wine-dealers, should, under the plea of the birth of a son, of marriage or of the death of someone, distribute hundreds of vessels of liquor adulterated with *madana*-juice (aphrodisia). Greed in the chiefs is to be provoked with golden rings and gold (left) at the portals of *caityas* and shrines.

Keepers of harlots or dancers, players or actors, after gaining access into the *samghas*, excite the sex of the chiefs by exhibiting women with bewitching youth and beauty. By removing the women to other persons or by staging that some others have violently carried them off, they should bring about violent quarrel among those that have fallen in love with them. In the ensuing affray, sharp spies would do their work and declare: Thus is the lecher destroyed.

After betraying her lover (a chief), a woman should approach another chief and say, 'That other chief is bothering me when my mind is set on you; while he remains alive I cannot stay here.' Thus the one will be provoked to kill the other.

A woman violently carried off at night will cause the death of her violator near a park or pleasure-garden with sharp weapons or poison given by herself. And then she will declare, 'My darling is killed by the other man.'

In the disguise of an ascetic, a spy, at night-time, may offer, to one sexually aroused, ointments claimed to have the power of captivating women but really mixed with poison; and then he will disappear. Other spies would be there to declare the incident to be a rival's act.

Widows with secret instructions, or women disguised as female mendicants, will, while pretending to quarrel over claim for a deposit kept with the king, (will show themselves off to the chiefs and will thus make the *samgha*-chiefs) mad with sex.

Harlots or dancing women or songstresses may make an evening appointment to meet a lover at some secret house and when they turn up sharp spies will kill them or carry them away in chains.

A spy will describe to a *samgha*-chief, who is fond of the female, saying, 'A poor man is removed from that village but his wife deserves to be a queen (in beauty). You must have her.' After she is carried away, a fortnight later, another spy in the guise of an ascetic will sharply denounce the chief in the tribal assembly saying, 'This man has forcefully detained my wife or daughter-in-law or sister or daughter.' When the *samgha* punishes the chief, the king will arrest

him and put him to tortures. Sharp spies, in the garb of mendicants, should be roving about at night. Spies, in various disguises, should accuse the chiefs saying, 'The man has slain a Brahmana and has committed adultery with a Brahmana woman.'

Disguised as an astrologer, a spy will predict about a marriageable girl, saying, 'This man's daughter is going to be a queen and the mother of a king; get her at any cost, even by force.' If one chief fails to get her, the spies should instigate his rivals to it. And when a rival succeeds a feud is inevitable.

A mendicant woman will tell a chief who is fond of his wife, 'This other chief, proud of his youth, asked me to entice your wife. Being afraid of him, I had to carry his letter and the ornaments for your wife. Your wife is innocent. But secret steps are to be taken against that chief and I shall anxiously wait for your success.'[185]

And so on. We come across pages after pages of these in the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya.

But why this peculiar zeal to destroy the group-life of the tribal societies? Kautilya[186] gave us a frank answer:

The acquisition of a *samgha* is better than that of an army (*danda*) or an ally. *Samghas* are invincible by others because of their unity (or organisation, *samhatavat*).

Kosambi[187] has rightly commented:

Such *samghas* were generally too strong to be destroyed by military action. This is fairly well confirmed by Alexander's campaign in the Punjab, where the stiffest opposition came from such tribal organisations.... The *Arthasastra* does not overestimate the formidable power of such *samghas* in resisting direct assault.

14. Massacre of the Vajjians

We may now try to understand this policy with reference to an actual historical event that took place long before the date traditionally ascribed to Kautilya. The Jaina literatures described the event as 'the last battle with large stones' and from the Buddhist sources we learn that the beginnings of the event was traceable as far back as the life-time of the Buddha.

There was, in those days, a confederacy of tribes called the Vajjians, the chief element of which was the famous Licchavis of the Pali texts. King Ajatasattu contemplated a campaign against them. The Buddhist text *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*[188] opened as follows:

The Exalted One was once dwelling in Rajagaha, on the hill called the Vulture's Peak. Now at that time Ajatasattu, the son of the queen-consort of the Videha clan, the king of Magadha, had made up

185 *Arthasastra adhikarana* xi. Free translation.
186 *Ib.* tr. Sama Sastri. 187 JBBRAS xxvii. 188.
188 Rhys Davids DB ii. 78-80.

his mind to attack the Vajjians; and he said to himself 'I will strike at these Vajjians, mighty and powerful though they be, I will root out these Vajjians, I will destroy these Vajjians, I will bring these Vajjians to utter ruin.' So he spoke to the Brahmana Vassakara (the rain-maker), Prime Minister of Magadha, and said: 'Come now, Brahmana, do you go to the Exalted One, and bow down in adoration at his feet on my behalf, and inquire in my name whether he is free from illness and suffering, and in the enjoyment of ease and comfort and vigorous health. Then tell him that Ajatasattu, son of the Videhi, the king of Magadha, in his eagerness to attack the Vajjians, has resolved, "I will strike at these Vajjians, mighty and powerful though they be, I will root out these Vajjians, I will destroy these Vajjians, I will bring these Vajjians to utter ruin"; and bear carefully in mind whatever the Exalted One may predict, and repeat it to me. For the Buddhas speak nothing untrue.' Then the Brahmana Vassakara, the rain-maker, hearkened to the words of the king, saying, 'Be it as you say.' And ordering a number of state carriages to be made ready, he mounted one of them, left Rajagaha with his train, and went to the Vulture's Peak, riding as far as the ground was passable for carriages and then alighting and proceeding on foot to the place where the Exalted One was. On arriving there he exchanged with the Exalted One the greetings and compliments of politeness and courtesy, sat down respectfully by his side (and then delivered to him the message even as the king had commanded).

Now at that time the venerable Ananda was standing behind the Exalted One, and fanning him. And the Blessed One said to him: 'Have you heard, Ananda, that the Vajjians foregather often and frequent the public meetings of their clan?'

'Lord, so I have heard,' replied he.

'So long Ananda,' rejoined the Blessed One, 'as the Vajjians foregather thus often, and frequent the public meetings of their clan; so long may they be expected not to decline, but to prosper.'

(And in like manner questioning Ananda, and receiving a similar reply, the Exalted One declared as follows the other conditions which would ensure the welfare of the Vajjian confederacy.)

'So long, Ananda, as the Vajjians meet together in concord and rise in concord, and carry out their undertakings in concord,—so long as they enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has been already enacted and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vajjians, as established in former days—so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vajjian elders, and hold it a point of duty to hearken to their words,—so long as no women or girls belonging to their clans are detained among them by force or abduction—so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vajjian shrines (*cetiyani*) in town or country, and allow not the proper offerings and rites, as formerly given and performed, to fall into desuetude—so long as the rightful protection, defence, and support shall be fully provided for the Arahants among them, so that Arahants from a distance may enter the realm, and the Arahants therein may live at ease—so long may the Vajjians be expected not to decline, but to prosper.'

This is highly interesting. It showed that what Kautilya said was nothing new. Long before Kautilya, the Buddha himself pointed out that the *samghas* or the tribes were invincible and unconquerable by direct military action and that the source

of their strength was derived from their group-bond. That is why, Kautilya did not recommend direct military action against the tribes. And the Brahmana minister Vassakara of the Buddhist text said precisely the same thing:

'We may expect then,' answered the Brahmana, 'the welfare and not the decline of the Vajjians when they are possessed of any one of these conditions of welfare, how much more so when they are possessed of all the seven. So Gotama, the Vajjians cannot be overcome by the king of Magadha; that is not in battle, without diplomacy or breaking up their alliance. And now, Gotama, we must go; we are busy and have much to do.'[189]

And the Brahmana Vassakara, the rain-maker, rose from his seat and went away. But the story did not end there. Buddhaghosa, in his *Sumangala Vilasini* tells us that it was 'on the Buddha's advice that Ajatasattu decided not to wage immediate war on the Vajjians, but to bide his time.' And he completes the story by stating that Ajatasattu, not confident of his ability to overcome the Vajjians by force, sent the unscrupulous Vassakara, in the guise of a refugee, to sow dissension among the Licchavi clansmen. Three years were spent by Vassakara in preparing the ground for Ajatasattu's invasion, at the end of which period the latter crossed the Ganges and occupied Vesali (the capital of the Vajjians) with little opposition.[190]

But the question is, how far can we actually rely on Buddhaghosa's account of this sequel to Vassakara's visit to the Buddha? He was after all a late writer. Nevertheless, Basham[191] has claimed that

it must be remembered that Buddhaghosa was himself a Magadhan, and may have had access to trustworthy records or traditions about the earlier history of his own country.

This is true. So there is likely to be historic truth in what he added to the account of the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*. We have, therefore, reasons to believe that the course of direct war was actually avoided and the unscrupulous methods of Kautilya were tried instead. In the *Sutta* itself, we find Vassakara giving clear indications of this. At the same time, there was something in Buddhaghosa's account which was obviously fanciful. The Buddha himself could not have advised king Ajatasattu to try the unscrupulous alternatives. His sympathy for the Vajjians was too outspoken to allow us to believe in this possibility. Se-

189 *Ib.* ii. 80-1. 190 Basham HDA 72.
191 *Ib.* 71.

condly, the defeat of the Licchavis could not have been as easy a matter as suggested by the commentator. For the evidences of the other texts are against this.

Nirayavalika,[192] a Jaina text, referred to the campaign of Ajatasattu against the Licchavis. The battle was fiercely fought and Cedaga, the chief of the Licchavis, killed a certain prince Kala of Ajatasattu's camp and completely routed the forces under his command. The final outcome of this battle is not discussed by the text. But another Jaina text, the *Bhagavati Sutra,*[193] mentioned the same battle. According to this, two battles were fought, called Mahasilakantae and Rahamusale. Ajatasattu (Kuniya) went to the first battle only after the news reached him that his forces were facing a setback. His ten brothers were already dead by the arrows of Cedaga. The victory of Cedaga was almost assured. But 'on the eleventh day, the god Indra presented Kuniya (Ajatasattu) with a great war-engine, which struck down the Licchavis with great stones.'[194] Thus ended the battle of Mahasilakantae. The outcome of the other battle referred to as the Rahamusale, too, according to the Jaina source, depended ultimately on some kind of divine intervention. Ajatasattu received from the Indra of the *asuras*, viz. Camera, a peculiar chariot armed with great club which caused devastation among the Licchavis.[195]

However, on the testimony of Jinadasa's *Avasyaka Curni* we may infer that the defeat of the Licchavis was not due to divine intervention only. It tells us that the real cause of the defeat was the treachery of a certain ascetic called Kulavalaya.

> He was won over by a beautiful prostitute in the employ of Kuniya (Ajatasattu), and persuaded to break his vows and to betray the city. Cedaga committed suicide by drowning, and the Licchavis emigrated to Nepal.[196]

Further, it deserves to be noted that in spite of all the boastings of Ajatasattu 'to root out, to destroy and to utterly ruin the Vajjians,' the defeat of the Vajjians was not so conclusive. As Basham[197] has rightly pointed out,

> The marriage of Chandragupta I to the Licchavi princess Kumaradevi, and the rise of a Licchavi dynasty in Nepal, indicate that the chief clan of the Vajjian confederacy retained its individuality for some eight hundred years after the war with Ajatasattu.

192 *Ib.* 69.
193 *Ib.*
194 *Ib.*
195 *Ib.* 70.
196 *Ib.*
197 *Ib.* 75.

Such was the indomitable strength of the tribal peoples.

15. Tribal Survivals

There is no reason to doubt the historic authenticity of this campaign against the Vajjians. And it is a typical illustration of Kautilya's policy towards the surrounding tribal societies: corrupting Kulavalaya by employing a beautiful prostitute supplies us with its last missing details.

Roychoudhuri[198] has argued that the battle referred to must have taken place soon after the Buddha's death. Basham[199] has tried to be more precise.

> If we accept c. 483 B.C. as the date of the Buddha's *nirvana*, on the basis of the *Mahavamsa* synchronism the accession of Ajatasattu must have occurred in the year C. 491 B.C., and his second campaign against the Vajjians c. 481-480 B.C..... We suggest that the first campaign occurred c. 485 B.C.

Kautilya, on the other hand, is said to have been the brain behind the Maurya Dynasty, which was established in 322 B.C. Thus the time-gap between Ajatasattu's campaign against the Vajjians and the actual composition of the *Arthasastra* must have been a considerable one. And yet the former illustrated, as it were, the policy formulated in the latter in meticulous details. This shows that the policy of Kautilya was put in actual practice long before he theoretically formulated it. This is possibly explained by the circumstance that Kautilya himself mentioned a long list of his predecessors, which takes his theory far back. Again, there are reasons to think that Kautilya's policies were actually in practice during many centuries after him. We find it being popularised in later classical *kavyas*.[200]

Such being the important part played by this policy in Indian history for so many centuries, it may reasonably be expected that one of the keys to the problem of the social structure of traditional India lies in the proper understanding of this policy. Bearing this in mind, we propose to look into it more closely.

There were in India, as there are even today, considerable patches of tribal societies. During the earlier times, such tribal areas must have been more extensive and also prominent. State powers were largely localised and even when the zone under

198 PHAI 171ff. 199 Basham HDA 74.
200 E.g., *Kiratarjuniyam*, *Sisupalavadham*.

the state's domination was very large, as in the case of the famous empires, there remained tribal societies within the orbit of the state administration. The tribal peoples, therefore, always created problems to the state-administrators. Kautilya's *Arthasastra* shows that the problems were really pressing.

So the question was: What was to be done with the tribal peoples themselves? That their tribal solidarity was to be broken and that they were to be subdued, is of course understood. But all these peoples could not obviously be physically annihilated. Therefore some method of rehabilitating them under a new set-up was demanded. Thanks to the clarity of Kautilya's formulation of the state policy, we are not left in the dark as to the nature of the method actually adopted.

Kautilya suggested two points. First, these tribal peoples, after their tribal solidarity was broken up, were no longer to be allowed to remain together. If allowed, they would, in spite of the military defeat suffered by them, gravitate again towards tribal solidarity, so natural and inherent in them, and then they would again take up arms and fight for their lost liberty.[201] So the first thing to do was to scatter them.

This brings us to the second, and by far the most important point about Kautilya's policy with regard to the tribal peoples. What were the means suggested by him through which these people were to be rehabilitated? Kautilya said that they were to be made to settle in small villages consisting of ten families or five families and were to be engaged in agriculture (*pancakulim dasakulim va krisyayam nivesayet*[202]). That such villages were to be isolated, and, therefore, self-contained, followed from the first principle: the possibility of contacts between these small groups of uprooted people was to be carefully avoided.

To sum up: the tribal societies were to be broken up and the *tribal peoples were to be rehabilitated in small and self-contained agricultural villages.* And it was a policy not merely suggested by a certain politician of the ancient times: it was also actively pursued during many centuries of our past history. It may, therefore, be reasonably expected that it should have important light to throw on the problem of the peculiar social structure of traditional India.

It was, as it were, a case of artificially changing the superstructure without an appropriate change taking place in the

[201] 377 (Mysore Ed)   [202] *Ib.*

basis itself. For it was not a case of the natural disintegration of the tribal societies consequent upon the advancement of the productive technique; it was rather a case of breaking up the tribal societies by attacking these from outside and forcing the tribal peoples to live in extremely small and isolated village communities, subject, as is well known, to the payment of a certain portion of the total agricultural product of these communities to the king or the lord, under whose rule these communities were brought. The contact between the rulers above and the villagers below was never particularly a strong one. The villagers were left to live their own lives in the villages and there naturally survived among them very strong relics of the tribal institutions and ideologies. In other words, the tribal peoples transplanted into the village communities retained much of the characteristics of their tribal past. Granting that some such policy was practised quite extensively and during a long period, the whole process led to a peculiar social set-up which may roughly be characterised as *despotism above with incompletely destroyed tribal society in the villages below.* Besides, there were actual tribal pockets too. The cumulative effect of all these is that the Indian masses, generally speaking, have retained in their lives strong elements that are traceable to the tribal society.

Lest there be an impression of over-simplification, we feel anxious here to be quite clear about our point. We do not want to suggest that the policy enunciated by Kautilya was followed everywhere in the same manner. Neither do we suggest that the policy of breaking up the tribal societies and rehabilitating the uprooted peoples in small and isolated agricultural communities was the only factor that contributed towards the formation of what we call the traditional Indian society. This social structure was itself a complex one and its development must have been the result of a complex process. Nevertheless, the policy formulated by Kautilya and actively pursued for centuries by the early state powers of India was presumably one among the various factors, and by no means an unimportant one, that contributed to the formation of the special characteristics of the traditional Indian society. And if we have dwelt too exclusively on these incompletely and artificially destroyed tribal elements, the reason is that their importance has not been properly acknowledged so far.

How far the policy thus outlined by Kautilya really accounts

for the distinctive peculiarity of the traditional Indian social structure, may still be an open question. But the fact remains that very strong survival of tribal elements had been a basic characteristic of the traditional Indian society and as such it is not possible to understand traditional Indian culture or, more particularly, Indian folk culture, without taking these into consideration. Awaiting, therefore, a fuller *explanation* of these tribal survivals, we proceed here to *illustrate* some of the more important of these.

We are going to discuss the following: a) The ethnological composition of the Indian peoples; b) The village communes and the question of the land tenure; c) The caste organisation; and d) The customary laws.

16. Ethnic Composition

Dependable reports of the census operations in India date only from 1871-2. However, the facts mentioned by the earliest of such reports are revealing.

There were then roughly 186 million men under direct British rule and 54 million in feudatory India. We leave, for the time being, the question of the latter; the report did not give us full facts about them. Of the 186 million under British rule, it would be convenient to leave for the time being also the question of the Mohamedans, numbering about 41 million, because the problem of their origin is complicated and, at any rate, their story as Mohamedans began comparatively late. We are thus left with the question of 145 million.

The census report of 1871-2 made the rather startling revelation that of these 145 million about 18 million were still living in the tribal stage. The bureaucrats referred to them as the aborigines or the non-Aryans and tried to explain their survival thus:

> Thrust back by the Aryans from the plains, they have lain hidden away in the recesses of the mountains, like the remains of extinct animals which palæontologists find in hill caves.[203]

However, more startling than this is perhaps the circumstance that the origin of more than 110 out of the remaining 127 million could not, really speaking, be clearly accounted for. Roughly 17 million belonged to the recognised ruling castes,

[203] Hunter IGI iv. 174.

described as 'the comparatively pure offspring of the Aryan or Sanskrit speaking race (the Brahmanas and Rajputs).' But what about the remaining peoples, numbering more than 110 million, and, as such, forming by far the largest majority of the Indian population? The British bureaucrats referred to them as the great mixed populations, grown chiefly out of the non-Aryan elements. By the non-Aryans, again, were meant the tribal peoples, the aborigines of the census report.

> Our earliest glimpses of India disclose two races struggling for the soil, the one was a fair-skinned people, which had lately entered by the north-western passes; a people of Aryan, literally 'noble,' lineage, speaking a stately language, worshipping friendly and powerful gods. The other was a race of a lower type, who had long dwelt in the land, and whom the lordly new-comers drove back before them into the mountains, or reduced to servitude on the plains. The comparatively pure descendants of these two races are now nearly equal in numbers; the intermediate castes, sprung chiefly from the ruder stock, make up the mass of the present Indian population.[204]

This was of course the usual nineteenth-century way of looking at Indian history—the fair-skinned and advanced Aryans conquering the ruder stock of the dark-skinned natives. It was discovering the whiteman's burden in ancient Indian history. The view was obviously based on equating the ruling class of ancient India with the Aryans. This was a mistake. But the mistake was not without reason. The ruling class in this country, beginning from very ancient times, were anxious to share the glory of those people who called themselves the Aryans. The rulers would try to establish pure Aryan descent for themselves. Of course, they had usually to do this in a highly artificial manner. The kings and nobles that established their rules in more or less detached areas of the country had rarely any real connection with the strictly Vedic peoples. The Mauryas, for example, had nothing to do with the so-called Aryans. Even the authors of the *Puranas*, or more properly those that revised the *Puranas*, had to admit this fact. Thus, for example, we are told that after Mahapadma Nanda, all succeeding kings would be Sudras or near-Sudras.

> This would mean primarily that they did not claim Vedic ancestry nor observe the pure Vedic ritual, and there is no reason to doubt this, for the Mauryas certainly did not.[205]

Nevertheless, the tendency of the rulers to announce them-

[204] *Ib.* iv. 172. [205] JBBRAS xxvi. 25 n.

selves as sharing the glory of the Aryans did not really cease after Mahapadma Nanda. Here is an example from comparatively recent history.

> The founder of the Maratha greatness was Sivaji. He was a ... Sudra. But when he carved out a small but absolutely independent principality for himself in 1664, he wanted 'coronation.' But the Brahmins were very unwilling to consecrate a Sudra as a king. So a geneology was manufactured declaring the Bhonsla family in which he claimed descent to be a branch of the Sisodias of Chittor and it was declared that the family by neglecting Ksatriya customs for many centuries had become *vraatyas.* A very learned Pundit of Banaras, but of Maratha descent, was invited to give an opinion that Sivaji was a *vraatya*-Ksatriya and that if he was purified according to the injunctions of *sastras,* the ceremony of coronation might be performed. The Pundit, Vishveshvara Bhatta by name, was a voluminous writer and a master of the art of disputation. He was, nicknamed Gaga Bhatta, as in assemblies called for disputation he bellowed like a bull. For fifteen days poor Sivaji had to undergo all sorts of purificatory rites and then he was anointed king.[206]

If this be a specimen of the zeal shown by the rulers of the country to claim pure Aryan descent, the nineteenth century historians may have their excuse for being misled to interpret Indian history in terms of the Aryans ruling over the non-Aryans. Fortunately, the more advanced historians of later times have discarded this approach to Indian history.

However, our present point is not merely this. It is, rather, the astonishing fact that by far the largest majority of the Indian population was observed by the early census officers to have 'sprung chiefly from the ruder stock,' that is, obviously, the tribal stock. But what was meant by springing from the tribal stock? Did it simply mean that they descended from the originally tribal peoples? But the same is true of all the peoples all over the world and as such there would hardly be any sense in making this a special point about the so-called mixed population of the country. Yet the early census officers were obliged to make this a special point, presumably because of the fact that the characteristics of the tribal life strongly survived among them: they were still largely tribal and yet they could not be characterised as purely tribal, that is, they were *detribalised only incompletely*.

What was true of India as a whole was obviously not true of all the parts of the country. But in some parts of India this feature stood out all the more sharply. Following are the observations of Dutta,[207] made in 1874, on the peasantry of Bengal:

[206] Sastri AV 1-2. [207] PB 11-2.

> Ever since the Aryans came into Bengal, it has been a main object with them to proselytize the aborigines, and large number of the latter have now entered into the ranks of Hinduism, but forming separate castes of their own, as Haris, Domes, etc.... Dr. Hunter (in his *Annals of Rural Bengal*) starts a very interesting question, namely, what proportion of the total population of Bengal are Hinduized aborigines. To this question he gives a very imperfect answer.

Dutta explained the reasons why the answer was imperfect and went on to examine the view of Beverley on the same question.

> Out of a total population of nearly 37 millions of Bengal proper, Mr. Beverley reckons the aborigines (Santals, Garos, etc.) at nearly 4,00,000 and the Hinduized aborigines a little over 5 millions. Under this last head he includes such people as the Bagdi, the Buna, the Chamar and the Muchi, the Candal, the Dome and the Hari, the Kaora, the Mal, the Mehtar and many other tribes. Though all these are reckoned as Hindus now, any one, who has carefully observed their peculiar modes of living in our villages, would have no difficulty to setting them down as descended from the aboriginal stock.

However, half a million of tribal peoples and five millions of 'Hinduized aborigines' did not obviously exhaust the 37 millions of Bengal's population. To these five and half millions, Dutta would add about two and half millions of peoples of superior castes, that is, those that claimed, however fictitiously it might have been, pure Aryan origin. And there were about half a million of high caste Mohamedans. Still by far the largest majority of the peoples were left out of account.

> Deducting then half a million of aborigines, five million Hinduized aborigines, two and half million high caste Hindus and half a million high caste Mohamedans from the total of nearly 37 million, we have about 28 million to account for. The question arises, then, have these 28 million descended from the aboriginal stock?

To this question Dutta answered with an emphatic affirmative. His explanation of the phenomenon was as follows:

> The Aryan conquerors of Bengal, after causing their religion to be widely spread through the land did not and could not exterminate the *aboriginal tillers of the soil.* It stands to reason to suppose that, while the brave and fierce aborigines retired to the wild and fastness of Bengal the weaker population accepted the religion of the conquerors and *remained, as they were before, the cultivators of the soil.*

The basic point of this observation, namely that the overwhelming majority of the peasants of Bengal were neither purely tribal nor completely detribalised, is extremely significant, and this, in spite of the confusion created by the favourite

theories of the nineteenth-century historians, viz. the Aryan conquerors *proselytizing* the native aborigines.

Substituting Aryan conquerors by the ruling class of the early state-powers and the native aborigines by the tribal peoples against whom their attacks were directed, we may try to understand what the process of proselytizing could have concretely meant in our earlier days. We have modern parallels of the same process and these may reveal the reality of the past. The less hypocritical and more matter-of-fact modern term for it is 'recruitment'—of agricultural labourers for the fields, coolies for plantations, diggers for the mines and of course cannon-fodder for colonial wars. Here is a an example. In 1881, Hunter[208] wrote about the Santals:

> The Santals dwell in villages in the jungles or among the mountains, apart from the people of the plains....Although still clinging to many customs of a hunting forest tribe, they have learned the use of the plough, and settled down into skilful husbandmen.... The whole village feasts, hunts, and worships together....So strong is the bond of race, that expulsion from the tribe was the only Santal punishment.... Until nearly the end of the last century, the Santals were the pests of the neighbouring plains.... But in 1789, the British Government granted the proprietory right in the soil to the landholders of Bengal under the arrangements which four years later became the Permanent Settlement. Forthwith every landholder tried to increase the cultivated area on his estate, now become his own property. The Santals and other wild tribes were tempted to issue from their fastnesses by *high wages or rent-free farms.*

We have the story of the Santal revolt as a rather rude commentary on the fairytale of *high wages or rent-free farms*:

> On the 30th of June, 1855, the Southern Santals, started in a vast body, 30,000 strong, with their bows and arrows, to walk to Calcutta and lay their condition before the Governor General.[209]

Further, it has already been shown that the real purpose of the Permanent Settlement was only 'to create a new class of landlords after the English model as the social buttress of English rule.'[210] However, what interests us at the moment is the frank admission of how, even in comparatively recent times, agricultural labourers were recruited largely from the tribal stock. 'Every proprietor,' said the London *Morning Chronicle* (1792), 'is collecting husbandmen from the hills to improve his lowlands.'[211] This is how, even in modern times, free savages were

[208] IGI iv. 177, 179. Italics added.
[209] *Ib.* iv. 179.
[210] Dutt IT 217.
[211] Quot. by Hunter IGI iv. 179.

being converted into agricultural serfs. It strongly reminds us of what Kautilya said centuries ago; only the role of the recruiting agents working among the tribal peoples to corrupt them and destroy their morals, was missing in the reports of the *Morning Chronicle*.

India, said Hegel,[212] 'is a phenomenon antique as well as modern.' In any case there are modern parallels of the ancient realities.

Kosambi[213] has already noted that the 'advance of the agrarian village economy over tribal country, is the first great social revolution in India.' This point is important, though often overlooked by our historians. What Kosambi himself overlooked, however, is the circumstance that the writings of Kautilya possibly preserve for us informations concerning *one of the ways*, though not necessarily the only way, in which this advance took place. It is presumably because of this that Kosambi gave us a rather one-sided picture of this ancient social transformation. He told us that the transformation took place *peacefully*, the role of violence being replaced in the Indian scene by the overwhelming force of religious beliefs.

> Marx noted only the backwardness engendered by the caste-system, the grip of the most disgusting ritual such as worship of the cow, cobra, monkey, which sickeningly degraded man. On the other hand without these superstitions assimilated by Brahmanism at need, tribal society could not have been converted peacefully to new forms nor free savages changed into helpless serfs—though peace between tribes (whose normal intercourse means war) and change from hunting or pastoralism to agriculture guarantee a decidedly more secure livelihood for the tribesman. Only an imposing ritual, or overpowering force or modern socialism could have won the savage over. The Indian method reduced the need for violence to a minimum by substitution of religion; caste and the *Smritis* adopted or replaced totem and taboo with more power than the sword or bow.

There is no doubt that the role of religious beliefs was there and it would be an error to overlook it. At the same time, we should not overlook the role violence and unscrupulousness played in the ancient times in transforming the free tribesmen into agricultural serfs. Kosambi appears to have on the whole exaggerated the importance of the religious factor, the Brahmin ritual:

> Brahmin ritual, moreover, was not just witch-doctor's mumbo-jumbo, but accompanied a practical calendar, fair meteorology, and

[212] LPH 145.

[213] JAOS lxxv. 35. The next quotations are from the same article, p. 36.

sound working-knowledge of agriculture technique unknown to primitive tribal groups which never went beyond the digging-stick or hoe. For all his magic cantrips the Brahmin immigrant into tribal lands was at first an effective pioneer and educator, though inevitably becoming a mere drain upon production.

But we have seen the *Brahmin immigrants in tribal lands* in some role other than that of this *effective pioneer*: the Brahmin reporters of the *Mahābharata* alluded to the *very secret mission* which made them stay among the tribal peoples and the *Arthasastra* made it clear that this was the mission of corrupting the tribal peoples with wine, women and lies. We have seen how the Brahmana Vassakara helped Ajatasattu's campaign against the Vajjians by putting these into actual practice.

Anyway, these tribal peoples had to be conquered by violence and force and had even to be massacred on extensive scale before being 'absorbed' within the orbit of the state-rule. The vast manslaughter known as Asoka's Kalinga war was probably a typical example.

17. Village Communities

Small and self-sufficient village communities had been a very conspicuous feature of the traditional Indian social system. We are going to discuss these insofar as they reveal the relics of tribal society.

Following is Marx's famous description of the village communities:[214]

> Those small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme ready cut and dried. Occupying areas of from 100 up to several thousand acres, each forms a compact whole producing all it requires. The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the State, into whose hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind. The constitution of these communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common and the produce divided among the members. At the

[214] C i. 357-8.

same time, spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side with the masses thus occupied with one and the same work, we find the 'chief inhabitant,' who is judge, police, and tax-gatherer in one; the book-keeper, who keeps the accounts of the tillage and registers everything relating thereto; another official, who prosecutes criminals, protects strangers travelling through and escorts them to the next village; the boundary man, who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities; the water-overseer, who distributes the water from the common tanks for irrigation; the Brahmin, who conducts the religious services; the schoolmaster, who on the sand teaches the children reading and writing; the calendar-Brahmin, or astrologer, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed-time and harvest, and for every other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a carpenter, who make and repair all the agricultural implements; the potter, who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber, the washerman, who washes clothes, the silversmith, here and there the poet, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the schoolmaster. This dozen of individuals is maintained at the expense of the whole community. If the population increases, a new community is founded, on the pattern of the old one, on unoccupied land. The whole mechanism discloses a systematic division of labour; but division like that in manufactures is impossible, since the smith and the carpenter, &c., find an unchanging market, and at the most there occur, according to the sizes of the villages, two or three of each, instead of one. The law that regulates the division of labour in the community acts with the irresistible authority of a law of Nature, at the same time that each individual artificer, the smith, the carpenter, and so on, conducts in his workshop all the operations of his handicrafts in the traditional way, but independently, and without recognizing any authority over him. The simplicity of the organisation for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the spot and with the same name—this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic Societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economical elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky.

Cooperative life, and even more important than that, the absence of private ownership of land among these communities, we are going to argue, were the survivals of the tribal system.

However, the validity of Marx's description is questioned. The key point of the controversy centres round the *ownership of land.*

Earlier writers like Wilks,[215] Campbell[216] and Maine,[217] arguing mainly on the Reports of Revenue and Settlement—the detailed registers 'of all rights over the soil in the form in which they are believed to have existed on the eve of the conquest or

[215] HSSI. [216] MI. [217] VCEW.

annexation'[218]—concluded that the traditional Indian village communities, like the Marks or Townships of early Europe as studied by Von Maurer, exercised joint ownership over land. As Maine[219] put it:

> The village-community of India exhibits resemblances to the Teutonic Township which are much too strong and numerous to be accidental.... It has the same double aspect of a group of families united by the assumption of common kinship, and of a company of persons exercising joint ownership over land. The domain which it occupies is distributed, if not in the same manner, upon the same principles; and the ideas which prevail within the group of the relations and duties of its members to one another appear to be substantially the same. But the Indian village-community is a living, and not a dead institution. The causes which transformed the Mark into the Manor, though they may be traced in India, have operted very feebly; and over the greatest part of the country the village-community has not been absorbed in any larger collection of men or lost in a territorial area of wider extent.

This comparison of the Indian village community to the Mark as studied by Von Maurer was significant, though it overlooked the point, already clearly explained by Marx and Engels, that this joint ownership of land which characterised the ancient Teutonic Mark was nothing but a survival of the tribal system. Before Maine wrote the above, Engels,[220] in answer to Duhring's fantastic claim (viz., that the serfs are necessary, because in order that man can bring nature under control the exploitation of landed property in tracts of considerable size is to be carried out, and who but the serfs working for the landed proprietors could carry on this exploitation of the land?), wrote:

> ....If we confine ourselves to the exploitation of landed property on a large scale, the question arises: whose landed property is it? And then we find in the early history of all civilized peoples, not 'the great landlord,' whom Herr Duhring interpolates here with one of his customary tricks of legerdemain, which he calls 'natural dialectic,' but *tribal and village communities* with common ownership of the land. From India to Ireland the exploitation of landed property in tracts of considerable size was originally carried out by such tribal and village communities; sometimes the arable land was cultivated jointly for account of the community, and sometimes in detached parcels of land temporarily allocated to families by the community, while woodland and pasture-land continued to be used in common. It is once again characteristic of the 'most exhaustive specialised studies,' made by Herr Duhring 'in the domain of politics and law' that he knows nothing of all this; that all his works breathe total ignorance of Maurer's epoch-making writings on the primitive constitution of the German Mark, the basis of all German law, and of the ever increasing mass of literature, chiefly stimulated

[218] *Ib.* 33. [219] *Ib.* 12.
[220] AD 263. Italics added.

by Maurer, which is devoted to proving the primitive common ownership of the land among all civilized peoples of Europe and Asia, and showing the various forms of its existence and dissolution.

It needs to be noted that Engels spoke of the 'tribal' *and* the 'village communities,' implying thereby that, according to his understanding, the two were separate, though the 'primitive common ownership of the land,' orginally a characteristic of the pre-class or tribal social organisation, continued to persist in the village communities of India, even as late as on the eve of the British conquest. This is an important point. For all the peoples all over the world, insofar as they have a tribal past, had also the history of the common ownership of the land behind them; the merit of Maurer's writings, called 'epoch-making' by Engels, consisted in tracing this history of common ownership behind the German Marks. Similarly the merit of the works of Wilks, Campbell and Maine consisted in showing that the early British Reports on Revenue and Settlement were evidences of the fact that this characteristic of the primitive pre-class society, namely the common ownership of land, continued to persist as a living feature of the Indian village communities, even when these communities were much ahead of the strictly tribal stage.

But the fact of this common ownership was vigorously questioned by some writers, foremost of whom was Baden-Powell. We shall therefore begin with an examination of some of his observations and arguments.

At any rate I think that we have every right to insist that the distinct existence of a type of Indian village in which 'ownership in common' cannot be proved to be a feature either of the past or present should be duly acknowledged; and that it is hardly possible to appeal to 'the Indian village-community' as evidence in any general question of archaic land-custom or of economic science, if we first obtain a single type by leaving out of view the wide area of a country which furnishes divergent forms or features.[221]

The type of the Indian villages which, according to him, disproved the evidence of ownership in common was the *ryotwari* one. But according to his own admission, there was another type of villages in India, which he called the *joint* village and to which Maine's description did apply. According to Baden-Powell's estimate, the total area covered by these two types of villages were as follows: Joint Villages—218,170 square miles;

[221] IVC 5.

Ryotwari Villages–575,313 square miles.[222] Therefore, even granting his own assumption that the *ryotwari* type of villages presented no feature of common ownership, we cannot deny that extensive areas of the country retained this feature. But his assumption is not beyond doubt. For even the villages of the *ryotwari* type were observed to retain strong relics of tribal equality and, therefore, ultimately of the tribal collective life. Thus, for example, Baden-Powell himself observed that the arable land of such villages, though divided into household estates, were periodically redistributed.[223] This periodic redistribution was meant to ensure equality, and as such, it was a relic of the pre-class tribal society. This had been a universal primitive practice.

> In Palestine, Transjordan, and Syria still another form of semi-collective ownership exists.... When the tribes settled originally, the arable land of each village was allotted between members equally, each member receiving a piece of land in different zones of the village; and to maintain equality between the members, the land was re-allocated at intervals.[224]

Thomson,[225] on the authority of Seebohm and Vinogradoff, has shown that this primitive practice of ensuring equality by annual redistribution of land characterised the early English villages too. As they put it, the practice rested directly on the principle that 'the soil was not allotted once for all to individuals but remained in the ownership of the tribal community, while its use for agricultural purposes was apportioned according to certain rules among the component households, strips for cultivation being assigned by lot.'

Many more parallels have been quoted by Thomson, the significance of which can hardly be overlooked. The point is that, periodic redistribution of the land by lot was universal of the early agricultural villages all over the world. And if the type of *ryotwari* villages, too, preserved this feature down to the beginnings of British rule, which it did according to Baden-Powell himself, then far from being evidences against joint ownership of land, this type of villages also are to be looked at as possessing strong relics of the tribal past.

Strangely enough, Baden-Powell, though so anxious to disprove collective-ownership of land, did not argue against the

[222] *Ib.* 8.
[223] *Ib.* 179-8, 324-5. cf. Maine VCEW 112.
[224] Quot. by Thomson SAGS i. 305 n. [225] *Ib.* i. 306.

survival of the tribal elements in these villages of *ryotwari* type. On the contrary, one of the specific points of his criticism of Maine was that the latter overlooked the tribal survivals in these villages.

In this fact I find the explanation of the total omission in Sir H. S. Maine's pages of any specific mention of the *ryotwari* form of village, and the little notice he takes of the tribal *or clan constitution of Indian races in general,* and of the frontier tribal villages in the Punjab.[226]

Again, referring to the *ryotwari* type of villages he said:

In the countries marked by the prevalence of villages of this type we are almost always able to note evidences of a *tribal state of society*.... There were clan divisions of territory containing a number of villages each under its own headman or chief.[227]

But what was meant by the *clan composition* and the *tribal state of society?* Evidently, largely because of his neglect of Morgan, Baden-Powell suffered from a rather peculiar notion about it; he overlooked the fact that the genuinely tribal state of society and private ownership of land were concepts irreconcilable. Private ownership emerged only at comparatively later stage of social progress. As Hobhouse[228] generalised:

We may express the whole tendency best by saying that the communal principle predominates in the lower stages of culture and retains a small preponderance among the pastoral peoples, and that private ownership tends to increase in the higher agricultural stages, but partly in association with the communal principle, partly by dependence on the chief, or in some instances by something in the nature of feudal tenure. We seem in fact to get something of that ambiguity as between signorial and popular ownership that we find at the beginning of our own history. Over and over again, at the stage in which barbarism is beginning to pass into civilization, the communal, individual, and signorial principles are found interwoven.... and it seems to be the next stage upwards in civilization that gives its preponderance to the lord.

Baden-Powell, however, wanted to work on a hypothesis which, in fact, made this historical process topsyturvy. His thesis obviously is that the type of *ryotwari* villages with private ownership of land was there at the beginning and the system of joint ownership was superimposed on it in certain areas by those that conquered the country. Referring to the *ryotwari* villages he wrote:

It is quite possible that when the first Dravidian and other tribesmen formed villages of this pattern, there was some general idea of

226 Baden-Powell IVC 4. 227 *Ib.* 9.
228 Quot. by Thomson SAGS i. 302-3.

tribal union, and that every member of the clan was entitled to receive an allotment sufficient for his wants; but there is on trace of common holding of the land occupied; the several portions of the village are allotted or taken up severally, and are enjoyed quite independently from the first.[229]

Common ownership, according to Baden-Powell, was introduced into these villages much later. This is how he wanted to explain the origin of the joint villages:

The body of owners who thus, whether their lands are partitioned or not, still hold together and have a certain joint interest in the village, arises in various ways.... I wish first to repeat once more that in all cases they are either a ruling, conquering, and often non-agriculturist caste, who have taken the superior or landlord position over *an earlier* existing village group of cultivators, usually of aboriginal or some mixed or humbler descent; or else they have founded their own village in the virgin waste, either by their own exertions, if agriculturist by nature, or by aid of tenants and dependants.[230]

As an inversion of the historic process, this must be manifestly false. Apart from what is known in general about the development of the institution of private property, a large number of specific cases are known in India in which individual or private ownership of land was introduced into originally tribal villages by those that established their rule over these.[231]

We now leave these modern Western writers and turn to consider certain older evidences which show that the private ownership of land had not been a prominent feature of the traditional agrarian India.

It is remarkable, as Maine pointed out, that the law-codes of such a predominantly agricultural country as India, presented 'a singular scarcity of rules relating specially to the tenure of land, and to mutual rights of the various classes engaged in its cultivation'.[232] Instead of that we come across laws concerning the revenue to be collected by the kings from the villages, which were usually one-sixth of the total produce of the village as a whole, called *bhaga* or *kara* by Manu.

This evidence of the ruler's right to a part of the village produce, together with the exaggerated epithets usually applied by the law-books to the kings, led some writers to imagine that the land was not owned by the cultivators at all; instead it was owned only by the kings. 'The native law of India,' said

229 IVC 9. 230 *Ib.* 21-2.
231 Roy MC app. II gives a very interesting example.
232 VCEW 51.

Smith,[233] 'has always recognised agricultural land as being crown property.'

The only serious argument so far adduced in favour of this theory of crown-ownership, however, is not the evidence of the Indian legal literature, but rather the account of the early Greek travellers. But Wilks already showed how little we can depend on such account.[234]

Therefore, Jayaswal[235] was quite right in retorting Smith:

> The native law of India as laid down by its own lawyers of unquestioned and unquestionable authority is the other way. It may be the native law of any other land; it is certainly not the native law of India.

However, the evidences mentioned by scholars like Jayaswal and others in disproof of the theory of crown-ownership were considered by them to be proofs of private property in the soil, and this in the sense of individual ownership as contrasted with collective ownership.

A critical review shows that though all these were really evidences against crown-ownership, there is nothing in these to prove private ownership or to disprove collective ownership. In fact, private ownership (or property in the modern sense) is not the only possible alternative of crown-property. There remains the other alternative, namely collective ownership, i.e., ownership in the ancient or tribal sense, the strong relics of which survived in the Indian village communities.

Jayaswal began with a quotation from Colebrooke's essay on Mimamsa.

> At certain sacrifices such as that which is called Viswajit, the votary for whose benefit the ceremony is performed is enjoined to bestow all his property on the officiating priests. It is asked whether a paramount sovereign shall give all the land, including pasture ground, highways and the sites of lakes and ponds, a universal monarch the whole earth, and a subordinate prince the entire province over which he rules? To that question the answer is: The monarch has not property in the earth, nor the subordinate prince in the land. By conquest kingly power is obtained, and property in house and field which belonged to the enemy. The maxim of the law, that 'the king is the lord of all excepting sacerdotal wealth,' concerns his authority for correction of the wicked and protection of the good. His kingly power is for government of the realm and extirpation of wrong; and for that purpose he receives taxes from husbandmen, and levies fines from offenders. But right of property is not thereby vested in him; else he would have property in house and land appertaining to the subjects abiding in his dominions. *The*

[233] Quoted Jayaswal HP ii. 181. [234] HSSI 112-3.
[235] HP ii. 181.

earth is not the king's but is common to all beings enjoying the fruit of their own labour. It belongs, says Jaimini, to all alike; therefore, although a gift of a piece of ground to an individual does take place, the whole land cannot be given by a monarch, nor a province by a subordinate prince, but house and field acquired by purchase and similar means are liable to gift.[236]

The earth was not the property of the king and the land was not the property of the subordinate prince. Whose property were these then? The crucial text quoted by Colebrooke which answered this question was Jaimini's statement that *the land belonged to all alike.* There was no suggestion of individual ownership here.

Jayaswal next quoted the authority of Nilakantha, which, as translated by him, runs as follows:

Similarly conquest and the other (modes) are (available) for a ruler (Ksatriya) and the others. On conquest the ownership of the conqueror arises only in respect of the houses, lands, and personality, etc. of the ruler conquered. Where the latter had a right to taking taxes, the conqueror acquires that much right, and no ownership. Hence *'by an emperor the whole country and by a provincial ruler the province is not a "deya"* (a *"subject of gift"*)' is laid down in Book VI (of the *Purva Mimamsa*). Proprietary right in the whole land with regard to villages and lands etc., lies in their respective *landlords etc.* The king's right is limited to the collection of tax therefrom. Therefore what is technically called at present *'gift of land'* etc. (by the king) does not mean giving away of land, but a mere creation of allowance. If house, land, etc. are bought from the owner (by the king) proprietorship indeed can arise.[237]

The word *landlords,* in this quotation, may suggest private ownership of the feudal type. But it is the result of a mistranslation. The landlords, as we understand them, being the creation of British rule, could not have existed during Nilakantha's times. The actual word used by him was *bhaumikadi.* Monier-Williams[238] has suggested that the literal meaning of *bhauma* is 'relating or dedicated to the earth, produced or coming from the earth.' Etymologically, *bhaumika,* in the plural, means the children of the soil; because it is the result of the suffix *snik* (lit., to indicate children) added to the word *bhumi* (land). Besides, it is to be noted that Nilakantha did not mention only the *bhaumikas;* he also added the word *adi,* (meaning 'and others') to it. Assuming *bhaumikas* to mean the landlords, the addition of 'and others' makes no sense. However, from the point of view of the meaning we have suggested, the addi-

[236] *Ib.* ii. 175. [237] *Ib.* ii. 176-7.
[238] SED 768.

tion of this word '*adi*' is quite logical. As we have seen, apart from the actual tillers of the soil, there were the craftsmen and others in the village communities; the land and the village (*bhumi-ksetradi*) belonged to them all, jointly.

Secondly, the mention of sale and purchase in this quotation, may create some confusion. We shall presently return to discuss the real sense of such sales and purchases.

Jayaswal[239] next quoted some other authorities: like Madhava, Katyayana, Mitramisra and the author of the *Bhattadipika*. However, none of these contain any decisive evidence in favour of the individual ownership of land.

Madhava referred to the *maha-bhumi* (the great land) as the common wealth of all living beings to enjoy the fruit of their labour. The author of the *Bhattadipika* spoke of the purchase of houses and lands, but these were, as in Nilakantha, *griha-ksetradan,* definitely contrasted to *mahaprithivi*. On this great land, there could be no right of any kind other than the right of the king to collect a portion of the produce of the cultivators. Katyayana and Mitramisra did not indicate anything more than this. We may therefore reasonably assume that according to these legal works, though the village land was not definitely owned by crown, there was neither any private nor individual ownership of these.

Kane,[240] too, mainly on the evidence of the law-codes of Manu, argued that the ownership of the cultivable land was vested in the cultivators rather than in the king. Referring to a considerable number of passages from Manu he argued that all these showed 'that Manu held that the ownership of arable land was in the cultivator himself and the king was entitled to demand a certain share in the produce.'

But the question is: were the cultivators, according to the law-books, owning their land individually or collectively? Kane was inclined to accept the first alternative though without adducing any definite evidence or argument in favour of it or against the second alternative. We are, therefore, not obliged to accept this point.

Jayaswal, in defence of his theory of the private ownership of land, has referred to the evidence of the inscriptions. 'Inscriptions proving to the hilt private property in the soil are extant.'[241] But, not to speak of analysing the implications of the inscriptions,

[239] HP ii. 177ff. [240] HD ii. 867-8.
[241] HP ii. 174.

he has not even mentioned any single inscription that could prove his thesis. Instead he has referred to, in his footnote,[242] an article in the *Indian Antiquary*. The same article was claimed by him to justify the following assertion.

Gupta title-deeds inscribed on copper-plates and registered at the district officers' office, whose seals they bear, clearly prove private ownership.[243]

This article, on the strength of which Jayaswal was proving private ownership so conclusively, was the rather well known one by Pargiter[244] on *Three Copper-Plate Grants from East Bengal*. Strangely, however, the plates actually examined here are strong evidences against the view of individual ownership of land and even the author of the article thought so. Of the three charters, the first was the clearest and Pargiter thought that it went to show that the land was the joint property of the villagers. Here is the inscription:

The leading men of the district (modern Faridpur), who were headed by Itita, Kulacandra, Garuda, Brihaccatta, Aluka, Anacara, Bhasaitya, Subhadeva, Ghosacandra, Anamitra, Gunacandra, Kalasakha, Kulasvamin, Durlabha, Satyacandra, Arjunabappa, and Kundalipta, and *the common folk* (*prakritayah*) were appraised by the agent Vatabhoga thus: 'I wish to buy a parcel of cultivated land (*ksetrakhanda*) from your honours and bestow it on a Brahmin; therefore do ye deign to take the price from me, to divide (the land) in the district and give it (to me).' Wherefore, we, giving heed to this request (and) *being unanimous*, determined (the matter) by an appraisal by the keeper of the records (*pustapala*) Vinayasena. There is in this district the rule established along the eastern sea (that) cultivated lands are things which may be sold according to the (rate of the) sum of four *dinaras* for the area that can be sown with a *kulya* of seed (*kulyavapa*) and that the evidence of a sale is by the custom of (giving) a copper plate, which custom applies immediately on seeing the counting made for the parcel of cultivated lands of such-and-such-sowing (area), and thereby the feet of the emperor receive the sixth part (future taxes) (*tacca parama-bhattaraka-padanam atra dharmasadbhagalabhah*), according to the law here. Therefore the agent Vatabhoga having adopted this procedure, (and) having by tendering the deposit (complied with it) by the act as well as by the intentions of one who has desired to establish the fame of his own merit (and) having paid twelve *dinaras* in our presence—we, having severed (the land) according to (the standard measure of) eight reeds (*nala* perhaps bamboo here) by nine (per *kulyavapa*) by the hand of Sivacandra, have sold to Vatabhoga a triple *Kulya*-sowing (area) of cultivated land in Dhruvilati by the custom of the copper-plate. This very Vatabhoga who desires benefit in another world as long as (this land) shall be enjoyed, while the moon, the stars and the sun endure, has joyfully, for the (spiritual) benefit of his own parents

[242] *Ib.* [243] *Ib.* ii. 180. [244] IA (1910) 193.

bestowed the land on (the Brahmin) Chandrasvamin who is of the Bharadvaja *gotra,* who is a Vajasaneya, and student of the six *angas* (imprecation against violators of the grant; limits of the area donated). The third (regnal) year, 5th day of Vaisakha.[245]

What deserves specially to be noted is that the land could be 'purchased' only on the basis of the unanimous approval of the *leading men of the district* as well as *the common folk.* This is evidence against individual or private ownership. Nevertheless, the fact of payment as well as the terms of purchase and sale are clear and these raise interesting questions. As Kosambi[246] has put it, 'The main question, then, is: to whom was the payment made, and for what purpose?' The payment could not possibly be to those who gave their consent, for they included not only the villagers but also the leading men of the whole district. Besides, 'the transaction was not for financial profit, nor an investment'; rather 'the land went to a Brahmin for spiritual merit gained by the purchaser and his parents.' According to the custom of the country, a piece of land, when it went to a Brahmin for such purposes, became tax-free. What was purchased, therefore, was presumably the exemption from taxation, the traditional one-sixth of the produce. In that case, the purchase of land meant only a compensation to the state-treasury for this exemption of taxation. Kosambi rightly observed:

> Thus the 'sixth part' mentioned would not be a sixth of the total price, but would indicate *payment made to the treasury* (*or to those whom the state held responsible for the taxes*) *in commutation of the sixth portion* of the yield, which was the standard land-tax in this period.[247]

The copper-plate under discussion belonged to the sixth century A.D. Other inscriptions and charters belonging to other periods give us roughly the same idea concerning the ownership of land. We may quote some of the observations of Kosambi.[248]

> Chandragupta's general Amarakarddava purchased the village of Isvaravasaka in A.D. 409-10 with money furnished by certain members of the royal household and presented it, with the interest of an added sum, to the support of the Buddhist monastic order at Sanchi. The purchase could only have been from the state, in the sense of compensation to the royal treasury after which the village revenues were assigned to the monastic order by the state; but this must be conjectured, in the absence of any further data about the village, from other grants of the Gupta period in Bengal. Indeed,

245 Tr. Kosambi JAOS lxxv. 232.
246 *Ib.*
247 *Ib.* 233.
248 *Ib.* 2[illegible]

purchase of any sort is unusual in these charters, and a private owner of that day selling land is unheard of. The Damodarpur plates do not indicate purchase of plots from the village council by immigrant strangers, as has sometimes been claimed. The payment there is clearly to the state, by a Brahmin or his patron, of compensation at the rate of 3 *dinaras* per *kulyavapa* for the right to cultivate family-size holdings in hitherto unploughed, marginal (*khila*), waste-land, WITHOUT payment of taxes. What had been purchased was freedom (in perpetuity) from taxation by a Brahmin or for a temple-plot, not the land itself; the officials concerned were ultimately responsible to the king.

The typical conditions of such freedom from taxation are to be found in an inscription[429] of the early fifth century. A.D. In this case, as in many other cases, the donor was the king himself. But the king was donating the land not as a proprietor but as one who was entitled to a fixed tax from the land; that is, the donation only meant forgoing the tax.

The charters dug up till now are overwhelmingly of land or village gifts made by kings to Brahmins.[250]

But what was meant by such gifts?

Generally, the king grants the right to tax-free cultivation; at a later stage, the village taxes themselves are also given to the donee. The taxes, being usually in kind, amount to a gift of grain. The tax donation conveys no proprietary rights in the land itself, which cannot be sold or alienated as a rule. The beneficiary is not accountable for tax-dues received, nor does he pass on some agreed fraction to the state as would be the case in later, feudal times.[251]

But even in later feudal times, whatever might have been the changes introduced into the taxation-system, private ownership of land did not develop, at least not as a universal feature of Indian economy. Even as late as the Moghul period, common ownership of land persisted over extensive areas of the country. As Wilks[252] pointed out,

The European travellers who visited the court of Aurungzebe in the latter part of the 17th Century are unanimous in denying the existence of private landed property in India.

Evidences like these are conclusive.

It is not possible for us to go into greater details over the problem of traditional Indian land tenure. As a matter of fact, the problem remains yet to be fully solved by our historians. What is necessary for our argument is already sufficiently discussed. We are trying to argue that tribal survival formed an

249 *Ib.* 230.
250 *Ib.* 228.
251 *Ib.* 229.
252 HSSI 114.

outstanding feature of the traditional Indian social system. The Indian village communities were examples of such survivals. The cooperative life and common ownership of land, obviously relics of the tribal system, were the main features of these communities.

Hegel and Marx already noted this. Said Hegel:[253]

> The whole income belonging to every village is, as already stated, divided into two parts, of which one belongs to the Raja, the other to the cultivators; but proportionate shares are also received by the Provost of the place, the Judge, the Water Surveyor, the Brahmin who superintends religious worship, the Astrologer (who is also a Brahmin, and announces the days of good and ill omen), the Smith, the Carpenter, the Potter, the Washerman, the Barber, the Physician, the Dancing girls, the Musicians, the Poet. This arrangement is fixed and immutable, and subject to no one's will. All political revolutions, therefore, are matters of indifference to the common Hindu, for his lot is unchanged.

The individual as individual, according to Hegel, did not exist in India. But what was the reason of this? Hegel thought that the answer was to be found in 'the character of Spirit in a state of Dream,' as the generic principle of the Hindu Nature.[254]

> Spirit has ceased to exist for itself in contrast with alien existence, and thus the separation of the external and individual dissolves before its universality, its *essence*. The dreaming Indian is therefore all that we call finite and individual, and, at the same time—as infinitely universal and unlimited—a something intrinsically divine.[255]

It was naturally left for Marx to tear off this veil of metaphysics and state the reality about the village communities in a clear and objective manner, i.e. to make Hegel stand on his feet.

18. Caste Organisation

The other outstanding feature of the traditional Indian society was the caste organisation. By this we do not mean the fanciful claim of superiority of the so-called higher castes over the lower castes (caste arrogance), but the real and peculiar organisation in which, the members of both the so-called higher and lower castes lived.

The problem of the castes is most complex. Senart[256] said that no statement made on the subject could be regarded as

[253] LPH 161.
[254] *Ib.* 147. [255] *Ib.*
[256] See Mitra C—WB (1951) vol. on CT 16.

absolutely true. Yet the literature on the subject is vast and the authors have seldom been able to agree among themselves:

> There are perhaps as many theories regarding the origin of the caste-system itself as there are writers on the subject.[257]

It is neither necessary nor possible for us to review all these theories. We are not going to attempt a full or final explanation of the problem. We are going to discuss the question only insofar as it concerns our argument. The argument is, that the castes, like the village communities, reveal very strong relics of the tribal organisation. The point has already been noted by Kosambi.[258]

> The entire course of Indian history shows tribal elements being fused into a general society. This phenomenon, which lies at the very foundation of the most striking Indian social feature, namely caste, is also the great basic fact of ancient Indian history.

It remains for us to explain the implication of this insofar as it illustrates our hypothesis of incomplete detribalisation.

Efforts were once made to explain the peculiarities of the caste system on the basis of the Brahmanical literatures, particularly the *Dharma Sastras*. Though among the contemporary authorities, Dutta[259] and others are still inclined to attach considerable value to the Brahmanical theories concerning the origin of the castes, as given, for example, in the codes of Manu, yet this reliance on the Brahmanical version of the caste organisation is, on the whole, now discarded. For, the reality about the castes did not and does not tally with the Brahmanical theory.

> It appears that in reality new occupational groups having the characteristics of castes had arisen, and the Brahmanic account of their origins was a mere theory based on permutations and combinations of the four original castes which bounded the Brahmin's mental horizon.[260]

Sengupta,[261] in his contribution to the *Census of West Bengal* (1951), has laboriously prepared two extremely interesting tables of the origin of the mixed castes and sub-castes as mentioned by the *Dharma Sastras*; and the tables conclusively show that the *Dharma Sastra* speculations on the origin of the mixed castes were utterly worthless.

However, the criticism and rejection of the Brahmanical

257 *Ib.* 17.
258 ISIH 25.
259 Mitra *op. cit.* 17.
260 Ghurye CRI 91.
261 Mitra *op. cit.* 47-8.

version of the caste theory are to be traced primarily to the two Buddhist scholars, Rhys Davids and Fick. The evidences of the Buddhist literatures, like the evidences of the coins and inscriptions, said Rhys Davids,[262] 'fitted very badly with the Brahmin theories of caste and history.' Yet so much reliance was placed during his days on these Brahmanical theories that, as Rhys Davids said, he had 'to declare war... against such views.'

Fick said that though the Brahmanical theories reacted powerfully upon the facts or actual conditions, yet these were promulgated without much reference to the facts and as such did not give us any picture of the real social conditions. Referring to Manu's theory of the four castes and the other mixed castes, he commented:

> It is *prima facie* evident that we cannot possibly have in it a true picture of the real state of things; and it is not difficult to see how there has been developed such a system. The names of the particular mixed castes show very plainly the material out of which the system is built; throughout it is either geographical or ethnical relations, names of lands or peoples, which give them their distinctive names, as, for example, Magadha, Nisada, Vaideha, Ambastha, Malla, Licchavi and Candala. Along with these and to a much smaller extent, professional categories determine the names, as Suta, cart-driver, Vena, maker of reeds, Nata, dancer, Kaivarta, fisherman. The self-contained existence of these and similar groups separated from the Aryan society, through contempt shown towards their race or their callings, was too evident to make it possible to ignore them quietly or to bring them under one or other of the four castes. The theory was widened and the mixed castes were annexed to the four original and recognised castes by giving their families or professional groups a wholly arbitrary genesis.[263]

If this be true, then, obviously, some source other than the Brahmanical law-books were to be relied upon in order to understand the realities about the castes. Fick himself mainly relied on the Buddhist *Jatakas,* as the alternative. But the caste system was not peculiar only to Buddhist India, whose picture, according to Fick, was faithfully reflected in the *Jatakas.* Castes are living realities in modern India, too, and as such, if we keep ourselves confined to the Buddhist sources only, however much might have been the comparative objectivity of these sources, the possibility of a full understanding of the problem is bound to be remote. Fick[264] himself realised this:

262 BI *pref.* vi.
263 SONIBT 8-9.
264 *Ib.* 2-3.

... we do not even hesitate to make use of the conditions of modern India which, on account of the stability of most oriental cultures, have preserved so much of the past, for comparison with and for the explanation of earlier periods.

When, however, we agree to do this, that is, try to understand the earlier periods in the light of contemporary realities, the most surprising phenomenon that strikes us is that, particularly among the backward peoples of India, the boundary line separating the tribal organisation from the caste organisation is not always quite clear. This is evident from the very titles of the books dealing with these backward peoples. These titles usually retain both the words *castes* and *tribes*,[265] betraying thereby that the line of demarcation between the two has not always been clear to the authors themselves. Besides, there has invariably been a separate volume of the census reports dealing with the backward peoples, and these volumes are described as *The Castes and Tribes*. Obviously, the census superintendents did not always know how to differentiate between the two clearly.

This phenomenon is not merely modern. Even the authors of our traditional law-codes and other works did not know whether to call a particular group of backward people a caste or a tribe. This is evident from the arbitrariness often found in the traditional usages. We shall mention here only a few examples. Manu[266] described the Licchavis as a low mixed caste; but it is evident from the other sources, particularly the Buddhist ones, that it was the name of a tribe, forming part of a confederacy of the Vajjians. Again the same authority[267] looked at Ambastha as a low caste, being born of a Brahmana father and a Vaisya mother; but in the *Mahabharata*[268] it is clearly described as a tribe. Similar was the case of the Ugras. Fick[269] has shown that this could only have been the name of an ancient tribe; but the Brahmanical works[270] called it a low-caste and, in accordance with the general Brahmanical tendency, tried to ascribe to it obviously fanciful and heterogenous genealogies. Similarly, 'Karna is a mixed caste in Gautama but clearly the name of a tribe in Manu.'[271] All these go to show

265 Outside the special volumes on *Tribes and Castes* in the *Census Reports*, the more outstanding works are by Iyer, Risley, Thurston, Russell and others.

266 x. 22.

267 x. 8.

268 JAOS Lxxv. 38.

269 *Ib.*

270 Mitra *op. cit.* 47-8.

271 *Ib.* 22.

that the ancient writers, like the modern census officers, were not always clear as to whether a particular group of backward people was to be called a caste or a tribe. The obvious corollary is that the caste organisation, beginning from early times, contained, as it still contains, very strong relics of the tribal.

This is proved not only by the circumstance that the words 'caste' and 'tribe' were, and are, often used interchangeably. The evidence is, in fact, deeper than mere matters of terminology. For the actual structure of the caste organisation, properly analysed, reveal the clearest survivals of the tribal.

The writers on the caste system are not unanimous as to its definition, and therefore, as to the essential feature of the caste organisation.

> Foreign writers have attempted to define the term, but it will be readily seen that these so-called definitions are often descriptions of only those characteristics of the caste system which the particular writer wishes to emphasise.[272]

Nesfield, Gait, Baines, Senart, Risley, Ketkar, Hutton, Ghurye, Dutta, and other writers are usually taken to be the standard authorities on the subject and they have given us different pictures of the essential characteristics of the caste system. Instead of being lost in the details of all these pictures, it may be more profitable for us to begin with a clear idea of the tribal organisation, and then return to examine the caste organisation to see how the different aspects of the tribal organisation are to be found surviving in the caste organisation.

The tribe is endogamous, though it contains sub-divisions within it, called the clans that are strictly exogamous. All the members of a clan have a strong belief in common descent; the original ancestor being usually imagined to be a plant or an animal, from which the clan borrows its name. Lastly, the council is the great feature of ancient society: all the affairs of the clan are managed by the clan council; similarly, at the tribal level there is the council of tribes with the supreme authority over all the members of the tribe. Expulsion from the tribe is the major form of tribal punishment.

We have mentioned these features of the tribal organisation because all these are found to characterise the basic features of the caste organisation.

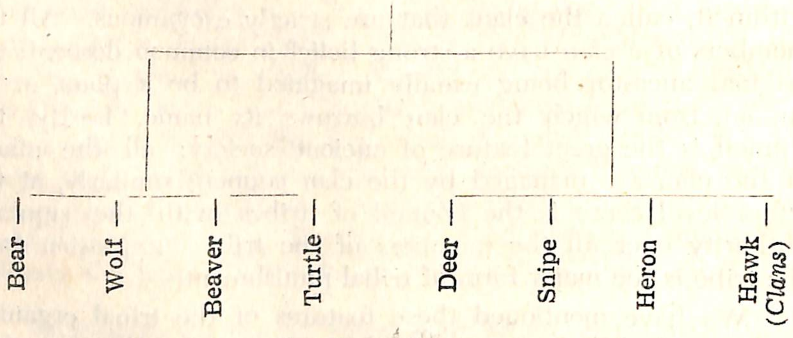
[272] *Ib.* 16.

a) *The endogamous group having within it strictly exogamous sub-groups bearing animal-names*: This feature is strikingly present in the caste organisation. We quote below certain examples from the *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, by Russell and Hiralal:

> The Ahir[273] caste has sub-castes, which again are divided into exogamous sections. The names of these sections are often titular and to totemistic animals.
>
> The Andh:[274] cultivating caste of Berar. Divided into two groups—1) *Vartati* or pure and 2) *Khaltati* or illegitimate—which take food together but do not intermarry. These again are divided into a large number of exogamous sets, a few of which names are totemistic, viz., *Majiria* (cat), *Ringni* (a kind of tree), *Dumare* (from Dumar, an ant-hill), *Dukare* (from Dukar, a pig) and *Titawe* (from Titwa, a bird), etc.
>
> Baiga:[275] a primitive Dravidian tribe, are divided into seven sub-tribes, which again are divided into a number of exogamous septs, the names of which are identical with those of the *Gonds, Markam, Maravi, Netam, Tekam,* etc. . . . No sept can marry into another sept which also worships the same god.

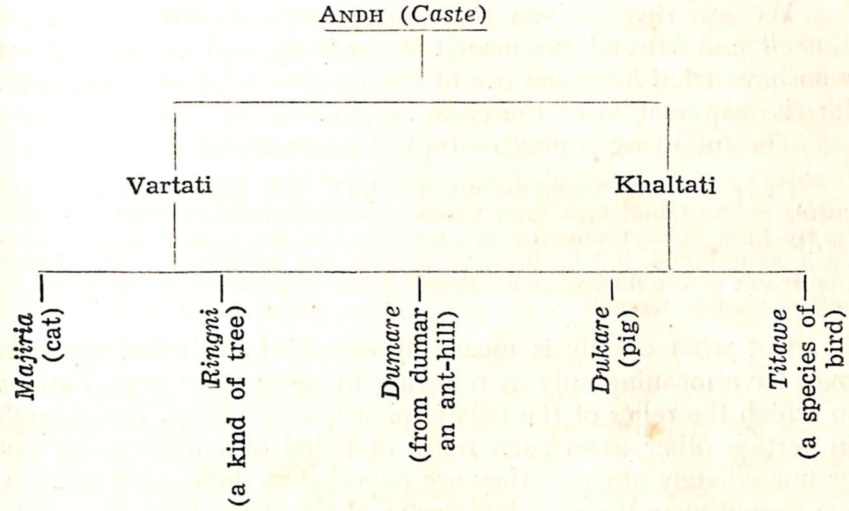
These examples are not carefully selected but are taken at random. The Ahir and the Andh are called castes by the authors; yet their organisation is strikingly similar to the classical structure of the tribal organisation as studied by Morgan. The following, for example, is the comparative chart of the Seneca tribe as described by Morgan and the Andh caste as described by Russell and Hiralal:

SENECA (*Tribe*)



(A person belonging to the Bear clan, e.g., cannot marry another belonging to the same clan. All clans are strictly exogamous.)

[273] TCCPI ii. 24-6. [274] *Ib.* ii. 38-9. [275] *Ib.* ii. 77-81.



(A person belonging to the 'cat' cannot marry another belonging to the same clan. All the sub-groups are strictly exogamous.)

It is of some interest to note that Russell and Hiralal have used the word *caste* with reference to the Ahir and the Andh whereas they called the Baiga a *tribe*. This terminological differentiation was arbitrary, because the organisation of all the three is broadly the same. Obviously enough, it has not been possible for the authors to differentiate strictly between the caste organisation and the tribal organisation. This uncertainty is further evidenced by the almost random use of such terms as *exogamous sections* and *exogamous septs*. The point is simple. 'Exogamous sept' is a known concept and, strictly speaking, it is relevant for the tribal organisation alone. Thus the Baiga, admitted by the authors to be a tribe, was reasonably described as composed of a number of smaller groups, the exogamous septs. However the same feature survived among the organisations of the Ahirs and the Andhs, considered by our authors to be castes. To describe this feature, however, they have, without any justification whatsoever, sometimes used the modified term 'exogamous sections' while, sometimes again, retained the term 'exogamous septs.' Besides, the frequent animal names of these exogamous septs were the most decisive proofs that these caste organisations contained strong relics of tribal organisation.

We are dwelling on this terminological arbitrariness of Russell and Hiralal because it is fairly typical of the authors who have tried 'to make use of the conditions of modern India' for the explanation of the caste system.

The following is another typical example:

> There are the *totemistic* clans which are *found amongst the castes of the tribal type*. The totem is some animal or vegetable formerly held in reverence by the members of the clan and associated with some *taboo;* but *by the time a tribe has developed into a caste*, the origin of the name has generally been forgotten, and the name itself is transformed.[276]

But what exactly is meant by *castes of the tribal type?* It may have meaning only as referring to those caste organisations in which the relics of the tribal are still very strong. But though in certain other cases such relics of tribal organisation are not as immediately obvious, they are nonetheless there; and, as such, we cannot view the so-called *castes of the tribal type* as a peculiar and distinct variety of caste.

Secondly, what is meant by the matter-of-fact assertion, '*by the time a tribe has developed into a caste?*' Is a law of general historical development referred to by this assertion? That seems hardly possible; because all the peoples all over the world began as tribes but did not necessarily develop into castes. 'The caste system is a unique institution.'[277] However, this unique character consists largely of the circumstances that the basic features of the tribal organisation remain, somehow or other, stabilised within the caste organisation. The tribes developed into castes but the castes could not shake off the relics of their tribal past. It is from this point of view that the statement quoted may be fully accepted. However, this point of view represents nothing but our hypothesis of incomplete detribalisation.

It is to be noted that the stabilisation of the tribal elements within the caste organisation is not a feature only of the so-called 'lower castes.' The essential features of the tribal organisation are found to survive, though in a comparatively less distinct form and as mixed up with a large number of other complications, even in the so-called 'higher castes.'

Thus the members of the Brahmana caste are subdivided into a number of smaller groups, called the *gotras*. These smaller groups are strictly exogamous and usually bear animal

[276] ERE iii. 233 (Italics added). [277] Mitra *op. cit.* 16.

names. A Brahmana, for example, is supposed to belong to the Kasyapa *gotra*. This name of the *gotra* is derived from the tortoise. That is, all the members of the Kasyapa *gotra* are supposed to be the descendants of an original ancestor who was a tortoise. As belonging to this tortoise-group, he is supposed to live under two very strict taboos. First, he must never eat tortoise. Secondly, he must not marry any member of the same *gotra*, that is, of the tortoise-group. This obviously shows that his Kasyapa *gotra* is but a survival of the tortoise-clan in which his ancestors were living when they were still to outgrow the tribal stage of social organisation.

It will be argued that the *gotra*-system (that is the *gotras*, grouped under broader categories called *pravaras*) is too complex to be judged in such an easy manner. The Brahmanical literatures devoted to the subject are enormous and these are at times almost hopelessly complicated. But that only proves that the Brahmanical literatures on the *gotras* were only attempts to rationalise the survivals of a very archaic system. Nevertheless, these Brahmanical literatures retain certain clear indications that suggest that even the *gotras* of the 'higher castes' were but survivals of the clan-system of the tribal society. We shall mention some of these.

In the *Rig Veda*[278] the word meant the cow-stall or herd of cows. How it subsequently came to mean the sub-groups within a caste is still a matter of conjecture. Kane[279] suggested that there was already in the Vedic literatures a tendency towards this shift of meaning:

> In some cases *gotra* probably means only 'assemblage' (*samuha*), e.g. *Rig Veda,* ii.23.18, vi.65.5. From this last sense of 'assemblage' the transition to the meaning of a 'group of persons' is both easy and quick. There is no positive instance of the word *gotra* being unchallengeably used in the sense 'descendants of a common patriarchal ancestor' in the *Rig Veda;* but the conception underlying the idea of *gotra* was, it is plain, quite familiar even in the age of the *Rig Veda*. In the *Atharva Veda* (v.21.3.) the word *visvagotryah* (belonging to all families) occurs. Here the word *gotra* clearly means 'a group of men connected together (by blood).' The *Kausika Sutra* (iv. 2) quotes a *mantra* in which *gotra* undoubtedly means 'a group of persons.'

Be that as it may. There is no doubt that in the later times the word clearly acquired the significance of consanguinity and

[278] JBBRAS xxvi. 21. [279] HD ii. 479.

common descent. Panini[280] and his commentators used the word in this sense and, as Fick[281] pointed out,

> the Indian lexicographers explain *gotra* as synonymous with *santati* (lineage), *janana* (race), *kula* (family), *abhijana* (descent), *anvaya* (progeny), *vamsa* (race), *anvavaya* (lineage), *santana* (family off-spring)—*Amarakosa* ii.7.1.

All these justify the following summing up of Kane:[282]

> The general conception about *gotra* is that it denotes all persons who trace descent in an unbroken male line from a common male ancestor.

The original ancestors over whom the members of the Brahmana *gotras* prided themselves were imagined to be *risis* or ancient sages. Such *risis* were, thus, referred to as the *gotra-karins*—'The founders of the numerous Brahamanical families, and their descendants are the various *gotras*.'

But this was obviously the result of an afterthought. For there were clear anomalies, contradictions and patch-works in these Brahmanical theories.

> The mass of material on *gotra* and *pravara* in the *Sutras,* the *Puranas* and digests is so vast and so full of contradictions that it is almost an impossible task to reduce it to order and coherence. The learned author of the *Pravaramanjari* (which is the leading work on the subject) wrote in despair, 'Here in the parts of *Sutras* that have been quoted, there is a great divergence in the order (of the names of *pravaras*) of the texts of the several *Sutrakaras,* this being specially so in the text of *Asvalayana Srauta Sutra.*'[283]

Following[284] are some examples of the confusions and contradictions:

According to the legend of the *Matsya Purana,* there came forth from Brahma the seven *risis,* or sages called Bhrigu, Angiras, Marichi, Atri, Pulaha, Pulastya and Visvamitra. The *Satapatha Brahmana,* however, gave a somewhat different list of the seven original *risis,* considered as the original ancestors: Gautama, Bharadvaja, Visvamitra, Jamadagni, Vasistha, Kasyapa and Atri. To this list, tradition added another, namely Agastya. This gives us the list of eight *gotrakarins.* However, the number of *gotras* supposed to have descended from them is, in the Brahmanical tradition, far from being constant. According to the *Asvalayana Srauta Sutra,* it was 49. According to a passage quoted by Radhakanta, the number was 24. In the

280 iv. 1. 162. 281 ERE vi. 353 n. 282 HD. ii. 484.
283 *Ib.* ii. 483. 284 ERE vi. 353.

Kuladipika, the total number was said to have been 40, though the text mentioned the names of only 32. According to the *Gotra Pravara Nibandhana Kadambam* the number was not less than 73. According to Baudhayana, however, the actual number of the *gotras* was much more.

Brahmin *gotras* are grouped into larger units (probably corresponding to the phratry) by common *pravaras,* of which Baudhayana recognises 49 sets in a far larger—almost unlimited—number of gotras.[285]

And so on. There are many more contradictions in the *gotra* system, which have already been pointed out by modern scholars. We need not go into the tiresome details over again.

One reason for these anomalies is already discussed by Kosambi.[286]

That the system did expand is certain, for it has catered to the needs of an increasing population while assimilating an additional number of regional and racial groups which could not possibly have belonged to the Vedic categories.

The fact remains that the *gotra-pravara* system, as we find it in the Brahmanical tradition, being largely the result of the attempts to rationalise and glorify a social institution which came down to these Brahmanical writers from antiquity, is almost hopelessly complex. Under these circumstances, there 'is no point in speculating how all these came about nor in attempting an explanation for every detail of the entire system.'[287] But the question is, which are the features of the *gotra* system on which we should concentrate for the purpose of understanding its origin?

The names of some of the *gotras* first. These names are most significant. We shall mention below some of those well known names along with the species of animals or plants from which they were derived.

The following names occur in the *gotra* list given in the *Asvalayana Srauta Sutra*[288]:

285 JBBRAS xxvi. 21.
286 *Ib.* 24.
287 *Ib.*
288 xii. 10. 6ff.

Vatsas	Calves
Sunakas	Dogs
Riksas	Bears
Bharadvajas	A species of birds
Mudgalas	A species of fish
Kapis	Monkeys
Ajas	Goats
Renus	Pollens
Venus	Bamboos
Kasyapas	Tortoises
Sandilas	A species of birds
Gotamas	Cows

In the *gotra* lists of other Brahmanical texts, we come across such interesting names as the *Kusikas* (owls), *Mandukas* (frogs), *Darbhas* (grass), *Tittiras* (parrots), etc. The suggestion is quite clear. The *gotras,* in their origin, must have been totemic clans. There can be no other explanation for such peculiar names. Yet this clear suggestion is sometimes missed by scholars. Thus, for example, it is argued, that

the *gotra* is a purely Brahmanic institution. In support, we find that instead of the animal or food-tree totems of savage tribes, the *gotras* are always derived from the names of sages.[289]

What the author apparently ignores are the circumstances that even the ancestors of those Brahmanas were once living the life of *the savage tribes.* This fact could not be completely concealed even by the most elaborate myths of *risi*-descent fabricated in later times to glorify the survivals of the ancestral institutions.

This is corroborated by the rule of strict exogamy prescribed for the *gotras.* It is true that *gotra*-considerations were regarded as very important in many a matter like the inheritance of wealth of one dying without any issue, the *sraddha* or the funeral rites, the performance of certain rituals, the offering of water to the dead, the manner of hair-cutting.

289 JBBRAS xxvi. 22.

But the diversity of *gotra* in relation to ritual had not so profound an influence upon practical life as had the rules prohibiting marriage between members of the same *gotra*, or inter-marriage between certain groups of *gotras*.[290]

This rule of exogamy was formulated with varied emphasis in various works.[291] Thus, for example, the *Gobhila Grihya Sutra* and *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* said that the bride must not belong to the same *gotra* as the bridegroom. Kautilya said practically the same thing. But according to the *Dharma Sutras* of Gautama and Vasistha, and the *Grihya Sutras* called after Manava and Varaha, marriage with a girl of the same *pravara* was prohibited. Manu and Vaikhanasa said that the bride must not be a *sapinda* (roughly, blood-relation) of the mother of the bridegroom. Yajnavalkya, Gautama, Vasistha and others went a step further and prohibited marriage of a *sapinda* girl to seven degrees on the father's side and five degrees on the mother's side.

It is not necessary to quote more examples. The point is quite clear. The *gotras* of the Brahmanas were meant to be strictly exogamous. The suggestion, again, is that these were the survivals of the ancient clans.

Thus, if we do not allow ourselves to be lost in the maze of all the complications created by the later writers who wanted to rationalise and glorify the ancient *gotra* system, and if we concentrate on the fundamental characteristics of the system, namely, 1) idea of a common descent of all the members belonging to the same *gotra;* 2) animal names usually assigned to the *gotras;* and 3) rule of strict exogamy for each *gotra,*—then, the clan origin of the system becomes evident to us. And the *gotra* system was vital to the caste organisation of the Brahmanas. Even the so-called higher castes, therefore, were not without very strong relics of the tribal organisation.

But the *gotra* system was not peculiar only to the Brahmana castes. This point was already argued by Fick.[292]

Nor can we in this investigation rely solely upon the Sanskrit literature; we must also take into account the Pali canon of the

[290] ERE vi. 355. [291] Kane HD ii. 436.

[292] ERE vi. 353. The quotations that follow are from the same article.

> Buddhists, and the books of the Jainas. If we then compare with the results thus obtained the data furnished by the ethnological materials found in modern Anglo-Indian literature, we may venture to draw from these various sources some conclusions regarding the origin and character of the *gotras* in ancient times.

This suggestion is very important and we may follow Fick for the rest of our discussion of the *gotra* system.

Buddha, a scion of the Sakya family, called himself Gotama. His father and also his cousin Ananda were addressed as Gotama. They were Ksatriyas. This shows that the Ksatriyas too were organised in *gotras*.

> That it was customary in addressing the individuals in question, to use, not the *kula* name (Sakya), but the *gotra*-name (Gotama), shows how high a value was set—precisely in the ranks of the Khattiya (*Ksatriya*)—upon membership in one of the ancient *gotras*. This finds expression also in a verse which frequently recurs in the Buddhist *Suttas*: 'The Khattiya is regarded as best among people who set a value on *gotta*.'

The evidences of the books of the Jainas are perhaps more precise and to the point.

> That the *gotras* were in no sense a purely Brahmanical institution is borne out, further, by the sacred writings of the Jains. Mahavira, the founder of this sect, and like Buddha, a member of the Ksatriya caste...belonged to the Kasyapa, *gotra;* and of course, Siddhartha, his father, Suparsva his paternal uncle, Nandivardhana his eldest brother, and Sudarsana his eldest sister were all likewise Kasyapas. On the other hand, Trisala, the mother of Mahavira, was of the Vasistha *gotra,* Yasoda his wife a Kaundinya, while his daughter who, while still unmarried was, of course a Kasyapa, passed by marriage into her husband's *gotra,* and her daughter, the grandchild of Mahavira, was of the Kausika *gotra*. Thus the traditions of the Jainas likewise lead us to infer that the Ksatriya families set as high a value upon *gotra* as did the Brahmanas, and that they observed the injunction against marriage within the *gotra;* for the family of Mahavira was connected neither by *gotra* nor by *pravara* with the two families with which, as just indicated, they intermarried.

In much later days, people claiming Ksatriya descent, were having the same or similar institution.

> The Rajputs, who claim to be the legitimate successors of the Aryan Ksatriyas, are divided into a great many clans or tribes, each tracing its origin to some ancestor of renown.... The Rajputs, taken as a whole, i.e., a caste, marry only within their own ranks; no Rajput may marry a woman who is not of the Rajput class. In

the several clans, however, the system of exogamy is so constituted that the males must find their wives in clans other than their own.

Similar was the case of the Jats.

The Jats, who likewise consider themselves to be descendants of the Ksatriyas, and in many respects stand on an equality with the Rajputs, are as a tribe strictly endogamous, but they resemble the Rajputs also in being divided into gentes or *gots,* and these, again, are exogamous. The Deswal, Man, Dalal and Siwal *gentes* of the Jats are of common descent, and must not inter-marry; and the like holds good of the Mual, Sual, and Rekwal *gentes* of the Rajputs.

Fick, as we have seen, wanted to compare all these results with the ethnographical data obtained in modern Anglo-Indian literatures. And this led him to the most important of all his observations on the *gotra* and caste system.

Among the lower Hindu castes and the indigenous hill-tribes, and especially among the Dravidian peoples of South India, we find almost universally a system of sub-division into small exogamous groups—in part also known as *gots* (*gotras*)—akin to that of the Brahmanical *gotras.* They resemble the Brahmanical clans in recognising descent in the male line, so that children belong to the father's *gotra,* not the mother's, while a woman passes by marriage into the gens of her husband, and persons of the same *gotras* cannot marry one another. These groups are distinguished from the *gotras* of the higher castes, however, by their undisguised adherence to totemism. Each of the exogamous clans bears the name of an animal, tree, plant or some other natural or artificial object, and the members of the clan are not allowed to eat, to cultivate, to burn, to carry, or in any other way to make use of that particular object. Thus to give a few specially characteristic examples—all the Bhils venerate totems and avoid injuring or using them, and when they pass their totem, they make a ceremonious bow, while the women veil their faces. Of the Bhils, the Ava clan takes its name from its totem, the moth, and its members do not injure moths. Among the Gollas, a large shepherd caste of the Telegu people, the members of the *gotra* called Raghindala (*Ficus Religiosa*) are prohibited from using the leaves of the sacred fig-tree as plates for their food.

And so on. We are thus back again to those backward peoples like the Ahirs, the Andhs and the Baigas, characterised arbitrarily as *castes* or *tribes* by authors like Russell and Hiralal. Volumes have indeed been written on these backward peoples still surviving in India, and an almost inexhaustible number of examples may be cited to show that this basic pattern of social organisation, i.e., the exogamous sub-groups (usually bearing animal or plant names) within the broader endogamous groups is to be found among them. However, the

point which is not sufficiently emphasised by modern writers on the castes is that it is precisely here that we must look for the origin of the caste organisation. The contempt felt for these backward peoples by the members of the so-called higher castes like the Brahmanas and the Ksatriyas was intense; their arrogance and pride of belonging to the higher castes was colossal; nevertheless, the fact remains that their own ancestors were once living in similar social organisations and that the features of this social organisation remained, presumably because of the stunted economic development of the country, fossilised in their own organisations of later times. That was their own caste organisation. The tribal organisation, in other words, gives us the real clue to the mystery of the caste organisation. And when this clue is missed, even the most imposing monograph on the caste system becomes a specimen of erudite nonsense. Even a Sanskritist as great as Wilson,[293] because he missed this clue, observed that the caste was after all a product of the Indian climate and the Indian character:

> Caste, which like rank luxuriant plants of the jungle could only have been generated under the inflammatory influences of a torrid clime, has been in no small degree perpetuated, until it became an omnipotent agency in Hindu social life, by the intense lassitude induced by the heat, and, the unwillingness to alter which is already established.

Again, Risley and Gait, in spite of their own collection of valuable ethonographical materials, wanted to explain the castes in the terms of the psychological peculiarities of the Indian people:

> It is clear that the growth of the caste instinct must have been greatly promoted and stimulated by certain characteristic peculiarities of the Indian intellect...its lax hold of facts, its indifference to action, its absorption in dreams, its exaggerated reverence for tradition, its passion for endless division and sub-division, its acute sense of minute technical distinctions, its pedantic tendency to press a principle to its farthest logical conclusion, and its remarkable capacity for imitating and adapting social ideas and usages of whatever origin. It is through this imitative faculty that the myth of the four castes, evolved in the first instance by some speculative Brahman and reproduced in the popular versions of the Epics which the educated Hindu villager studies as diligently as the English rustic used to read his Bible, has attained its wide currency as the model to which the Hindu society ought to conform.[294]

[293] Quoted by Mitra *op. cit.* 18.
[294] *Ib.* 38.

We do not really know who was this 'speculative Brahmana' that first evolved the myth of the four-castes; but we do know that such explanation of the castes in terms of some hypothetical racial psychology as evolved by these speculative bureaucrats is no less mythical in nature.

(b) *The caste-council and the punishment of caste expulsion*: We shall now pass on to consider briefly certain other features of the caste organisation which, too, can only be understood as but survivals of the tribal organisation.

The Council is the great feature of the tribal society and expulsion from the clan is the severest tribal punishment. Among the Santals[295] and others this form of punishment still persists.

Similar are the principles of caste government and caste punishment.

> Caste discipline is maintained by the members of the community through their recognised leaders.... Sometimes they hold offices with well defined duties, but usually, especially amongst the functional castes, they form a standing committee, or *panchayat*, which deals with all branches of caste discipline and other matters affecting the community. The decisions of the *panchayat* are final, and their authority is unquestioned. Minor breaches of caste rules and restrictions can be expiated by a ceremony of purification and a feast to the fraternity; but for more serious offences, or for contumacy, the penalty is excommunication. A man against whom this sentence has been pronounced is cut off from all intercourse with his caste fellows, who will neither eat nor smoke nor associate with him; he is shunned as a leper, and his life is made so miserable that he soon becomes eager to accept any conditions that may be imposed upon him. Should his offence be too heinous to permit of atonement, he is driven to seek admission to some lower caste, or to become a Mohammedan, or to hide himself in the towns, where the trammels of the caste system are weaker and less irksome than in the villages.[296]

(c) *Functional castes and occupational clans*: It may be objected that the view of the caste organisation we are trying to uphold cannot be acceptable, for it does not explain a very important feature of this organisation, e.g. the fixed and unalterableness of the profession of the different castes.

Our answer is that the unalterableness of profession is not and had not been such a fundamental characteristic of caste organisation which we are often misled to believe by the theoretical discussion of the Brahmanical law-books. Fick,[297]

[295] See note 208 of this chapter. Cf. Thomson AA 35.
[296] ERE iii. 232. [297] SONIBT 216ff.

for example, has already shown that the *Dasa Brahmana Jataka* conceived the Brahmanas to follow quite a considerable variety of professions. This does not certainly mean that the 'functional castes' did not exist or that the rigidity of profession did not form any feature of the caste organisation whatsoever. Indeed, from the earlier times, many a caste has been known by its profession, and even in the modern times certain definite professions remain restricted within certain specific castes. However, all these do not disprove our hypothesis of the tribal survivals in the caste organisation. For, this unalterableness of occupation is itself a characteristic of the tribal organisation, thought at its comparatively higher levels. As Thomson[298] has put it:

> In the earliest phase of tribal society the only division of labour had been sexual, but, with the development of stock-raising, tillage and handicrafts, specialised occupations tended to become hereditary in particular clans.
>
> ... as Gronbech has shown, the guild is descended from the clan. The only structural difference between them is that membership of the guild is not determined by birth, except in so far as the son becomes eligible by following his father's vocation; and even the primitive clan commonly admits strangers by adoption. Since the craft clan is a widespread feature of the higher stages of tribal society, there is no difficulty in supposing that it existed in primitive Attica; and even if it did not, at least there existed the primitive clans out of which the craft clans subsequently evolved.

It is from this point of view that Thomson has explained the craft clans of ancient Greece: the Homeridai (rhapsodes), the Asklepiadai (physicians), the Iamidai, Branchidai and Krontidai (soothsayers), the Euneidai (lyre-players), the Kerykes and Theokerykes (heralds). And there is no doubt that such castes of ancient India described as the Sutas (cart-drivers), the Venas (makers of reeds), the Natas (dancers), the Kaivartas (fishermen) were either actual craft-clans or fossilisations of the craft-clans in the form of occupational castes, many an example of which we find in India today. Thus, like *gotra*-exogamy, the occupational rigidity of some of the castes and sub-castes had been but relics of the tribal organisation. Unfortunately, however, this point was not clearly remembered even by the more eminent writers on the caste system. As a result, fantasies have sometimes taken the place of scientific explanation. Slater,[299] for example, thought that 'the occupational groups became en-

[298] AA 44, 45. [299] Mitra *op. cit.* 17.

dogamous due to magic, religious ceremonies and the natural desire to preserve trade secrets.' There is, of course, no basis for such a conjecture; the institution of exogamy must have been the original character of the early clans, Similarly Roy,[300] in his otherwise magnificent contribution to the problem of the castes, has stressed

the importance of the primitive ideas of taboo, mana and soul-stuff in the formation of the caste system, and also on the Indo-Aryan concept of *karma* and a certain taboo-holiness that came to be attached to the Brahman because of his supposed spiritual power.

There is no doubt that such ideological factors contributed to the formation of the complexities of certain caste elements. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the real clue to the castes is to be found elsewhere. It is in the tribal organisation. *The castes are not tribes, yet these are largely tribal.* This is our hypothesis of incomplete detribalisation.

19. Customary Laws

The same feature of tribal survival is to be found in the field of the Indian legal system. The point is clearly borne out by the brilliant analysis of Maine, with which it would be convenient for us to begin.

It was once supposed that the *Dharma Sastras* were the repositories of the laws of the land. However, this was soon found to be an error by the early Anglo-Indian administrators. As Maine[301] observed:

... the more exclusively an Anglo-Indian functionary has been employed in 'revenue' administration, and the further removed from great cities has been the scene of his labours, the greater is his hesitation in admitting that the law assumed to begin with Manu is, or ever has been, of universal application.

Maine called these laws of the *Dharma Sastras* the *codified laws* and he claimed:

Complete and consistent in appearance as is the codified law of India, the law enunciated by Manu and by the Brahminical commentators on him, it embraces a far smaller portion of the whole law of India than was once supposed, and penetrates far less deeply among the people. What an Oriental is really attached to is his local custom.[302]

Again,

300 *Ib.* 301 VCEW 52. 302 *Ib.* 39.

. . . the whole of the codified law of the country—that is, the law contained in the Code of Manu, and in the treatises of the various schools of commentators who have written on that code and greatly extended it—is theoretically connected together by certain definite ideas of a sacerdotal nature. But the most recent observation goes to prove that the portion of the law codified and the influence of this law are much less than was once supposed, and that large bodies of indigenous custom have grown up independently of the codified law. But on comparing the written and the unwritten law, it appears clearly that the sacerdotal notions which permeate the first have invaded it from without, and are of Brahminical origin. I shall have to advert to the curious circumstance that the influence of these Brahminical theories upon law has been rather increased than otherwise by the British dominion.[303]

The unwritten laws by which the lives of the peoples were largely governed, being based on indigenous custom, were aptly characterised by Maine as the *customary laws.*

The early Anglo-Indian administrators, thus, had to face these customary laws and to incorporate them to a considerable extent into their own judicial system. Interestingly, this was not a new phenomenon. Maine himself did not note that the same problem of facing the importance of the customary laws and of being obliged to incorporate these within the body of the official laws was felt long ago by the authors on the Brahmanical laws themselves, however distasteful these customary laws might have been to them. We quote Kane[304] to show an example.

There is also a text of Brihaspati which prescribes that the practices of the countries, castes and families should be guarded (or enforced) by the king as they have been in vogue from past times, otherwise the subjects become inflamed and among such practices he instances, 'Brahmanas in the South marry the maternal uncle's daughter.'

Again,

Brihaspati, while illustrating the proposition that the king should not disturb popular usages even though they may be improper, cites several such practices among which he mentions, 'In some other countries there is the most reprehensible practice of a brother taking (as wife) the widow of his deceased brother, and the practice of delivering a maiden to a family.[305]

We have quoted these two passages from Kane because the specific instances mentioned therein, have some light to throw on the genesis of the customary laws. The first of the two laws was concerned with cross-cousin marriage – marrying the

[303] *Ib.* 20. [304] HD ii. 462. [305] *Ib.* ii. 555.

daughter of the maternal uncle or the paternal aunt. The second, i.e., delivering a maiden to a family (rather than to an individual, and as a result of this, the husband's brother becoming himself the husband), was obviously a relic of group marriage.

We are going to argue that both these laws represented the survivals of the tribal institutions (though of different stages of development) and, if it is found that laws like these were important features of the customary laws, then the presumption would be that the customary laws had their origin in tribal institutions.

The question of the cross-cousin marriage first. It could either be marrying the daughter of the maternal uncle or that of the paternal aunt (*matula pitrisvasri duhitri gamana*). In either case, the authors of the codified laws condemned it[306] as it strongly went against their principle of *sapinda*-prohibition. In the *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* it was called a form of mortal sin. Baudhayana agreed with Gautama to condemn the practice on the ground that it was opposed to the *Smritis* and the views of *sistas* (learneds). Manu prescribed the penance called *candrayana* for the sin of approaching the daughter of the father's sister or the mother's brother and he added that a

> wise man should not take as his wife (any one of) these; they are not fit to be wedded because they are (*sapinda*) relatives, for by wedding them one sinks low (i.e. falls into hell or loses caste).

Many more examples may indeed be quoted to show that the cross-cousin marriage was strictly forbidden by the authors of the codified laws.

At the same time, they were obliged to admit that such marriages formed part of the customs of certain parts of India, particularly of the southern parts. Baudhayana, in the passage already referred to, said that marrying the maternal uncle's or the paternal aunt's daughter was one of the five practices peculiar to the South; further, it is evident from his writings, that some of the writers on codified laws used to argue that since the cross-cousin marriage was part of the recognised custom of the South, it was a sin only in other parts of the country, implying thereby that in the South it was not considered to be a sin. Of course, Baudhayana himself wanted to refute such an

306 The following references are to be found in Kane HD ii. 458-9.

argument. But we have already seen that it was argued on the authority of Brihaspati himself that the king must obey and accept the custom. In fact, this practice of cross-cousin marriage was cited as the most prominent example of such custom. Others argued that there were *Sruti* authorities, and also of course, the practice of the *sistas* (learned elders) that justified such a practice. Thus, for example, the following *Sruti* was mentioned by the authors of the *Smriti Candrika* and *Parasara Madhaviya.*[307] The *Satapatha Brahmana* said:

> Thus the separation (of the eater and the eaten) is effected in one and the same act; hence from one and the same man spring both the enjoyer (the husband) and the enjoyed (the wife); for now kinsfolk live sporting and rejoicing together saying, 'in the fourth or third man (generation) we shall unite.'

Uniting in the fourth or third generation, according to these authors, meant cross-cousin marriage. They cited another Vedic verse though it belonged to a very late stratum of the Vedic literature (*Khila Sukta*). This is,

> Come O Indra, by commended paths to this our sacrifice and partake of your portion. They (the priests) have offered the fat seasoned with *ghee* that is thy portion, as the maternal uncle's daughter or the paternal aunt's daughter (is one's lot in marriage).

Sruties like these, to say the least, are remarkable. However, it is not necessary for us to digress and discuss whether the real implications of such texts actually supported cross-cousin marriage or not. What is relevant for our argument is only to see how tenacious was the effort of some of the authors on the later codified laws to make place for the regional customs within the general framework of the legal system. It is the same tenacity which led the authors of *Smriti Candrika* and *Parasara Madhaviya* to argue further that 'Southern *sistas* deeply read in the *Vedas* and, acting according to the meaning of the *Veda,* practise marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter.' The author of the *Smritimuktaphala* offered the same argument.

To sum up. Not only the Anglo-Indian administrators of the early British period but also some of the authors on the codified laws were themselves keenly conscious that, whatever might have been the basic claims of the codified laws, it was necessary to make room also for the customary laws within the

[307] *Ib.* ii. 461.

general legal system; or else the legal system would obviously become too unreal to be acceptable.

So the questions are: what was the source of these customary laws and why was the hold of these laws on the lives of the peoples so deep and fundamental?

We are going to answer these questions as follows. The customary laws had their sources in the tribal laws. Their hold on the people remained so strong because the elements of the tribal society were only incompletely eliminated from their lives. In other words, the same hypothesis with which we tried to explain the basic features of the village communities and the caste organisations, throws light also on the survival of the customary laws. We have here a case of convergent suggestions.

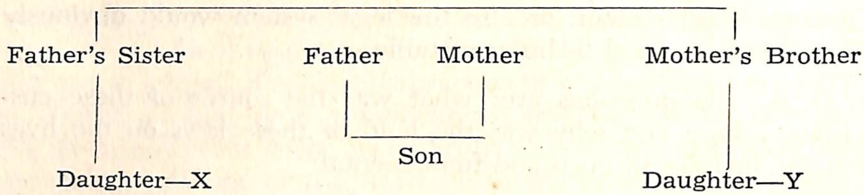
Let us begin with the question of the sources of the customary laws. The law of cross-cousin marriage was chosen by the earlier authors as the best example. The Brahmanical authors were of course discussing the question from the patriarchal point of view. They asked whether it was legitimate for a male to marry his maternal uncle's or paternal aunt's daughter. But the custom itself was obviously a part of the matriarchal organisation. This is evidenced in more than one way. The custom still persists in those areas of the country where the survival of the matriarchal elements is evident even today.

> Among several castes in the Deccan and the Madras Presidency, not only is marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter allowed but it is highly commended. 'Even certain Brahamana castes like the Desastha Brahamanas of the Karnataka and Karhada Brahamanas observe this practice in modern times.[308]

The areas referred to are full of relics of matriarchy.

What is more significant is that the cross-cousin marriage discussed by the authors of *Dharma Sastras* was invariably looked upon by them as marrying the *maternal uncle's daughter or the paternal aunt's daughter*. The implication is that the maternal uncle's daughter had originally been the same person as the paternal aunt's daughter. This means that the maternal uncle was the husband of the paternal aunt; i.e., the mother's brother was married to the father's sister. This would be clear from the following simple table:

[308] *Ib.* ii. 462.



If, from the point of view of the son, daughter *X* and daughter *Y* was really the same person then the mother's brother could have been none but the father's sister's husband.

This leads us to view the marriage custom in an entirely new light. It is the complicated matrimonial relationship underlying the classificatory system of kinship terminology.[309] Incidentally, Morgan, who was the first to explain the classificatory system scientifically, based his conclusion on an analysis of 150 languages. One of these languages was Telugu, i.e., the language of precisely that region of India where the custom of cross-cousin marriage still persists and where it did prevail at the time of the authors of the *Dharma Sastras*, giving them such an awful problem to solve. In Telugu, the same word refers to 'mother's brother's daughter' and 'father's sister's daughter'; it is *vadine*. Again, there is only one word to refer to the 'father's sister's husband' and the 'father-in-law.' The word is *mama*. 'Mother's brother' is called *menamama*. Similarly, there is only one word for the 'mother's brother's wife' and the 'mother-in-law.' It is *atta*. Father's sister is called *men-atta*.

We need not go into further details of the classificatory system of kinship terminology in Telugu. The subject had already been exhaustively treated by Morgan and the modern critics of Morgan have been well answered by Thomson, who has summed up the matrimonial relationship underlying this kinship terminology as 'the whole system turns on the continuous inter-marriage of cross-cousins.' It was this custom of cross-cousin marriage prevalent among the ancestors of the modern Telugu-speaking people which our authors of the *Dharma Sastras* considered to be extremely repulsive; and yet they, like the administrators of the early British days, could not entirely ignore the impact of the customary laws. Some of them were, therefore, resorting to the surreptitious methods of finding place for these within the system of codified laws. The

[309] Thomson SAGS i. 68.

hold of such customary laws on the lives of the people was so strong that the act of ignoring these would have exposed the entire legal system to the risk of being unreal and unworkable.

But what was the origin of this customary law concerning cross-cousin marriage? Thomson,[310] following Morgan, has summed it up thus:

> Cross-cousin marriage is the form of marital relations that results from the inter-marriage in each generation of two exogamous groups. All relatives are classified according as they belong to the speaker's own group or to the other.

This brings us to the other customary law mentioned by the *Dharma Sastras*. Brihaspati, it is said, referred specifically to two customary laws, one concerning cross-cousin marriage and the other concerning the practice of giving the daughter in marriage *to a family* instead of to an individual. We can now see that the second did not have any source other than that of the first. Both were survivals of group-marriage.

It may be objected that the practice referred to by Brihaspati was fraternal poliandry rather than group-marriage. This is the sense in which eminent scholars have understood it. Our answer is that, first of all, this interpretation is doubtful. For there was no mention of *only one* girl being married to a number of brothers jointly; the implication rather seems to be that *any* girl that was given in marriage became wife-in-common of all the brothers. Presumably, more than one woman were married to the same family. That is, a number of women became wives-in-common of a number of brothers jointly. Secondly, even assuming that the practice referred to was only fraternal poliandry, our argument would not be fundamentally disturbed; for fraternal poliandry, like sororate was itself a survival of group-marriage.

To sum up. The two customary laws mentioned in the *Dharma Sastras* were inter-related and both represented the survival of the tribal system. Secondly, the writers on the codified laws found such customary laws highly objectionable; yet they felt obliged to make room for these within the legal system because, as frankly admitted, the grip of the customary laws on the lives of the people was too strong to be ignored.

This was roughly the situation of the legal system long before the advent of British rule. The early British adminis-

[310] *Ib.* i. 68-9.

trators found the situation to be basically the same. As Maine said, what the people were really attached to were their local custom.

Such customs or the customary laws were but survivals of the tribal society. Maine did not say this in so many words; nevertheless, this alone could be the implication of his statements and comments. He spoke of the '*primitive* usage' which 'was from the first most carefully observed and most respected.'[311] One 'great instrumentality,' through which was preserved for centuries 'this great body of unwritten custom, differing locally in detail but connected by common general features' was, according to him, 'the perpetual discussion of the customary law by the people' and that it could be so preserved was accounted for by the fact that '*the social constitution of India is of the extreme ancient....type.*'[312] The point is, words like *primitive* and *ancient*, in the context of the social organisation, can only mean the tribal.

20. Tribal Survivals Pass into Their Opposites

We have tried to explain our hypothesis of incomplete detribalisation with reference to the ethnic composition, the village communities, the caste system and the customary laws of the country. It now remains for us to examine the significance of the tribal survivals more closely.

Because of the backwardness of their mode of production, the tribal peoples are poor, ignorant and often pitiably exposed to the hostile forces of nature. There is, therefore, no question of making a cult of the natural savage, as some earlier thinkers wanted to. There is no question either of taking a very romantic view of the tribal peoples.

> Truth is often prosaic but many people seem to thrive on a romantic rather than a truthful picture of the situation.... It must be realised that the life of the tribal people in India does not consist of one continuous round of music and dance.[313]

Even the poorest workers living in our industrial slums are, in many senses, better situated than the free savages of our frontier hills.

> Gordon Childe has pointed out, that even the lowest paid workers in Mesopotemia were better off than the free and equal members of

[311] VCEW 52.
[312] *Ib.* 56. Italics added.
[313] Bose in A 118.

any neolithic village. The urban revolution had brought about an absolute rise in the standard of living.[314]

At the same time there is another side of the picture. This is how our Prime Minister has felt about our tribal neighbours:

In the tribal people I have found many qualities which I miss in the people of the plains, cities and other parts of India. It was these very qualities that attracted me.... We should have a receptive attitude to the tribal people. There is a great deal we can learn from them, particularly in the frontier areas, and having learnt, we must try to help and co-operate. They are an extremely disciplined people, often a great deal more democratic than most others in India. Even though they have no constitution, they are able to function democratically and carry out the decisions made by elders or representatives. Above all, they are a people who sing and dance and try to enjoy life; not people who sit in stock exchanges, shout at each other and think themselves civilised.[315]

What is the source of these charming qualities that we find among the tribal peoples with all their pitiable poverty and backwardness? The question was answered by Engels[316] long ago:

The grandeur and at the same time the limitation of the gentile order was that it found *no place for rulers and ruled.* In the realm of the internal, there was as yet no distinction between rights and duties; the question of whether participation in public affairs, blood revenge or atonement for injuries was a right or a duty never confronted the (Iroquois) Indian; it would have appeared as absurd to him as the question of whether eating, sleeping or hunting was a right or a duty. Nor could any tribe or gens split up into different classes. This leads us to the investigation of the *economic basis of those conditions.*

The population was very sparse.... Division of labour was a pure and simple outgrowth of nature; it existed only between the two sexes.... Each owned the tools he or she made and used.... The household was communistic, comprising several, and often many, families. Whatever was produced and used in common was common property: the house, the garden, the long boat.

In short the economic basis of what the civilized men find attractive about the tribal peoples, is their communism, though it be primitive. It is this primitive communism which, as Engels said, made the tribal constitution 'wonderful in all its childlike simplicity,'[317] full of 'the mysterious charm with which the Germans infused new vitality into dying Europe.'[318] *The grandeur and at the same time the limitations of the gentile order* rest on the extremely low level of technological development. Human

[314] Thomson SAGS i. 24.
[315] Nehru in A 1-3.
[316] OF 258-9.
[317] *Ib.* 160.
[318] *Ib.* 254.

labour-power at this stage cannot produce more than is necessary for its maintenance. So there is poverty; but, in the absence of any surplus, there is no scope for exploitation either.

How technological advance undermined this primitive equality, and how we are to assess this process of historical development from primitive communism to class-society, are questions, into the complexities of which we need not enter here. Our present point is rather to see that the elements of the tribal organisation, *when torn off from their root in this original economic basis*—i.e., communism—and artificially brought forward, as it were, to a complex social structure detribalised only incompletely, *lose their original vitality and purposiveness and pass into their opposites.* They become empty and petrified forms and linger merely as the dead burdens of the past.

We have seen how the tribal elements survived in the village communes, the caste system and the codified laws. We shall now see their degradations.

The village communities first. Following are the famous observations of Marx[319] on the destruction of these village communities by British rule in India. Significantly Marx called these *semi-barbarian, semi-civilised communities,* that is, the complex social structure that were incompletely detribalised.

> Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organisations disorganised and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization, and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindustan.

Similarly, we have seen that the caste organisation has basically been the survival of the clan organisation. The wonder-

[319] Marx & Engels OB 382-4.

ful system of clan co-operation in the tribal life is well known. No less known, however, are the most dreadful sense of exclusiveness and isolation of the human groups created by the caste organisation in the social fabric of traditional India. Marx[320] called the castes the 'decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power' and we Indians know it only too well that he was not at all exaggerating. What served in the tribal stage as an organisation of united front against the hostile forces of nature, became, in the form in which it survived later, the most important of all the factors in our country that set up men against men.

In the customary laws, too, the tribal survivals appeared merely as the dead weight of the past. This made the peasants mere slaves of time-worn customs.

> Each individual in India is a slave to the customs of the group to which he belongs; and the customs of the several groups, various as they are, do not differ from one another with that practically infinite variety of difference which is found in the habits and practices of the individual men and women who make up the modern societies of the civilized West.[321]

21. Problem of Ideological Survival

We proposed to view ideology not as 'directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life'. The ideological superstructure is thus to be understood according to the same principles as the social basis itself. If, therefore, it is true that the life of the Indian masses remained detribalised only incompletely, then the sources of their dominant world-outlook should logically be sought in the beliefs and ideas of the tribal peoples, though the original significance of this world-outlook, like that of the tribal survivals themselves, must have eventually passed into its opposite.

What interests us most is the original nature of this world-outlook. We are going to argue that it must have been instinctively materialistic or proto-materialistic,—the collective labour of the tribal life being a guarantee for that. Interestingly, surviving as it did in the lives of the working masses (*lokesu ayata*), this proto-materialistic character was not completely lost from the popular *weltanschauung*, called the Lokayata.

How far such an argument can be historically justified will of course be borne out by the rest of our studies. At this stage we

[320] *Ib.* 390. [321] Maine VCEW 13-4.

shall raise only one question: Do we come across any evidence in our ancient literatures that may indicate some connection between the archaic form of the social organisation (*gana*) and an archaic form of the materialistic outlook? We do, however fragmentary the evidence may be.

There is a *sutra* in Panini[322] which reads *vraatena jivati*, i.e. live according to the *vraata*-way. Patanjali commenting on it, said:

> The *vraatas* are *samghas* of people of various kinds, whose professions are not fixed but who live on manual labour; their work is *vraatam* and those who live by this kind of *vraata-karma* are *vraatinah*.

This was further elaborated in the other standard commentaries. The *Kasika* reads as follows:

> The *vraatas* are *samghas* and *pugas* of people of various kinds, whose professions are not fixed and who have for their *summum-bonum* material wealth and the sexual urge (*artha-kama-pradhanah*).

Bhattoji added:

> Those who live by manual labour (*sarirayasena*) rather than by the wealth of intelligence (*buddhi vaibhavena*) are *vraatinah* (belonging to the *vraata*).

Let us now examine the implications of these statements.

Gana, vraata, samgha, puga, sreni, were but terms interchangeable. We have already elaborately examined the terms *gana, samgha* and *vraata* and have seen that the collectivity indicated by these, in the context of the human organisation, simply meant the tribal collectivity. Thus the *vraatinah* referred to were simply the tribal peoples as the early grammarians knew them.

According to the *Kasika*, the people thus described were *artha-kama-pradhanah*, that is, they considered material prosperity and the erotic life to be the highest forms of human ideals. This is extremely significant. There is no other epithet in the field of Indian philosophical terminology more patently meant for the materialists. It may, therefore, be presumed that the other human ideals, namely *dharma* and *moksa*—the religious upliftment and the final liberation of the soul—were yet to dawn on the consciousness of those people living the collective life. The birth of the spiritual values in human consciousness went

322 v.2.21.

hand in hand with class-division: the world-outlook of the primitive pre-class society was pre-spiritualistic and, in this sense, proto-materialistic.

Significantly, the grammarians also indicated the logical basis of the connection between this proto-materialism and this primitive *gana*-life. Patanjali said that these people were living on manual labour. Bhattoji went a step further and clearly contrasted this manual labour (*sarirayasa*) with the 'wealth of intelligence (*buddhi-vaibhava*). To the grammarians, this naturally appeared as a mark of degradation. Living as they did in class-divided society, they could not but share its sentiments, they could not but look at the tribal life around them with contempt and disgust. It was logically also a contempt for the *sarirayasa* or manual labour, because in a class-divided society manual labour had already become a mark of servitude and slavery. The instinctively materialistic world-outlook generated by the process of manual labour,–a world outlook which appeared to the grammarians as *artha-kama-pradhanah*–too, did not earn their respect either.

> From tribes there developed nations and states. Law and politics arose and with them the fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind: religion. In the face of all these creations, which appeared in the first place to be products of the mind, and which seemed to dominate human societies, the more modest productions of the working hand retreated into the background, the more so since the mind that planned the labour process already at a very early stage of the development of society, was able to have this planned labour carried out by other hands than its own. All merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind, to the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explain their actions from their thoughts, instead of from their needs—and so there arose in the course of time that idealistic outlook on the world which, especially since the downfall of the ancient world, has dominated men's minds.[323]

This is how Engels wanted to explain the birth of the idealistic outlook. It conformed to the first full statement of Marxism by Marx and Engels.

> Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it is *really* conceiving something without conceiving something *real;* from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from

[323] Engels DN 238-9.

the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.[324]

It is from this point of view that we shall try to review the history of the birth of idealistic outlook in Indian philosophy. However, what particularly interests us at the moment is that if the social process leading to the degradation of manual labour (*sarirayasa*) and the exaltation of mental labour (*budhi-vaibhava*) really gives us the clue to the origin of the idealistic outlook, it is also here that we are to seek the key to the problem of the destruction or downfall of the primitive proto-materialistic outlook. Evidently, when the grammarians were speaking of the *vraatinah* as *artha-kama-pradhanah,* they were referring to this primitive proto-materialistic outlook of the peoples that were still living the collective life of the tribal societies. The idealistic outlook and the spiritualistic values in general were yet to dawn on their consciousness; this consciousness, because it was yet to be divorced from the operations of manual labour, was yet to be emancipated from the world and to recognise any human ideal other than the attainment of material wealth (*artha*) in this world.

But the grammarians did not speak only of *artha* being the *summum bonum* for these *vraatinah.* They also spoke of *kama* along with *artha,* and *kama* meant the erotic urge. This is crucial. For this gives us a distinct hint as to the nature of the primitive proto-materialistic outlook referred to. We shall see in Chapter V that this world outlook, in its more developed form, found its expression in Tantrism and that Tantrism had its ultimate source in the belief underlying the early agricultural magic, namely, that the productivity of nature is induced or enhanced by the imitation or the contagion of the human reproductive process or aspects thereof.

Pending a fuller discussion of this point, we may end this chapter with a brief note on the question of ideological survival. We have argued that the tribal elements, in the form in which these survived in the lives of the peoples, no longer retained their original significance but were already converted into their opposites. Assuming ideology to be vitally related to social reality, we only expect the same transformation to have taken place in the history of the ideological survivals, too. In Chapter V, again, we shall see how this actually took place. The Tan-

[324] G1 19-20.

trika beliefs and practices retained their grip on the lives of the Indian masses; but these no longer retained the original force of their proto-materialistic character. In short, these too passed into their opposites and thus became only appropriate receptacles for all sorts of spiritualistic ideas and terminologies that were continually superimposed on these. The result was a bewildering mass of written treatises on Tantrism, some of which presenting Tantrism with a strong flavour of Buddhism, others with that of Hinduism. This resulted in the so-called Buddhist *Tantras,* the Saiva *Tantras,* the Sakta *Tantras,* the Vaisnava *Tantras,* and what not.

As a matter of fact, the process of the transformation of the primitive proto-materialism into the natural receptacle of the spiritualistic ideas did not end only in this growth of the huge heap of heterogeneous literatures on Tantrism. The same process manifested itself in another direction and had a far reaching consequence in the history of Indian philosophy. For, as we have already indicated and as we shall see more fully, the Sankhya system, in its origin, presumably represented the same archaic materialism of original Tantrism though in an obviously more self-conscious form. However, as we shall also see, this original materialism of Sankhya system, too, eventually passed into its opposite and, as early as the *Sankhya Karika* itself, i.e., the earliest written treatise on Sankhya available for us, it was virtually transformed into a form of disguised Vedanta or absolute idealism. But more of this in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER FOUR

GAURI

STUDIES IN INDIAN MOTHER-RIGHT

It remains for us to consider another aspect of our tribal heritage, viz., of mother-right. A clear knowledge of this is crucial for our understanding of the Lokayata, more particularly, of the basic concepts of Tantra and Sankhya. In Tantra, as in Sankhya, the female principle or *prakriti* is viewed as the fundamental reality, the cause of the universe. Such an idea could only be the reflection, in the sphere of philosophical abstraction, of the social supremacy of the female. It will remain for us to see why this philosophical position had logically the tendency to gravitate towards a kind of instinctive naturalism or proto-materialism. However, it is necessary, at the beginning, to be clear about the general theoretical position concerning the economic basis of mother-right itself.

We are going to argue that because agriculture is the discovery of women and which remains their exclusive preoccupation in its early stages, it created conditions for the economic—and, therefore, also of social—supremacy of the female. It is here that we find a material basis of the ideological emphasis on *prakriti* (*prakriti pradhanya*) of the Lokayata trend in Indian philosophy. By contrast, the Vedic ideology was *purusa-pradhana*, or male dominated. The material basis of this, as we shall see, was their pastoral economy.

1. AGRICULTURE AND THE EXIT OF MALE

There is a folk ritual known in some parts of the country as the *Ganesa Caturthi Vrata*. Its performance is spread over a

number of days, beginning from the fourth day of the month of *Bhadra* (August-September). The most remarkable feature of the ritual, however, is that though its name is still associated with a male god, he has practically very little to do with the ritual itself. In some comparatively undeveloped parts of the country, Ganesa stands in the ritual simply for the new moon of the sowing season.[1] In the other parts, he is abruptly made to quit the scene as it were, leaving the ritual to take a thoroughly feminine character. According to Gupte,[2] on whose description of the ritual we are depending here, the image of Ganesa is discarded on the second day of the performance of the ritual and from then on we hear only of a female deity instead. She is Gauri; but she is not the Gauri of our familiar Puranic pantheon. Instead, she is merely a bundle of plants, along with her human representative: a virgin.

The plants are collected by women, placed on a diagram drawn with turmeric powder. While wrapping these up in a bundle, married women are served with vermilion. Only women remain to participate in the rest of the ritual centring round this bundle of plants. The plants, along with the virgin, are carried from room to room and asked, 'Gauri, Gauri, what do you see?' The virgin answers, 'I see prosperity and plenty.' To make this dramatic visit of Gauri realistic, her supposed footprints are actually drawn on the floor showing that she *did* enter the rooms.

The next day's function begins with offering cakes made of rice and coconut kernel to the deity. Every married woman then takes hand-spun cotton-thread, sixteen times her own height in length, and places it before Gauri. Then in the evening, 'all the girls in the house sing songs and dance, keeping up late, visiting the houses of girl friends for dancing and singing in front of Gauri.' Unfortunately, Gupte has not given us any details of these songs and dances.

The next day, the effigy is offered food consisting of crescent-shaped pancakes. Then each woman collects her own cotton-thread which, on the previous night, was placed before the figure; each folds her thread into smaller skein and sixteen knots are tied on it. These are next dyed with turmeric and tied by each woman round her neck. The necklace is retained until the next harvest day, when it is removed before the sun

[1] Crooke RFNI 36. [2] IA xxxv. 60 ff.

sets and ceremoniously thrown into the river. Meanwhile, on the day on which the necklaces are worn, the effigy of Gauri is thrown into a river or a tank and a handful of earth is brought home from the bank and scattered all over the house and the garden. It is, again, only a woman that carries the effigy to the river and she is warned not to look behind, just as is when carrying a dead body.

Fables are usually told after the performance of such *vratas* or rituals. The fable of this *vrata* is quite simple. Once upon a time there lived a very poor person. Driven by poverty, he went to drown himself into the river. An old married woman appeared before him; she persuaded the poor man to return home and herself accompanied him. With this old woman came prosperity to his home. Then came the time for her to depart. The man took her back to the river and the old woman gave him a handful of earth from the river-bank and asked him, in order to ensure plenty, to scatter this earth over every possession of his. He was also asked to repeat this every year in the month of Bhadra and that, in honour of Gauri.

Following are Gupte's[3] observations on the ritual:

> The rationale of the ceremony suggests: 1) The alluvial soil of the river-side or tank as the original seat of the crops, 2) the old woman as the old season going out, 3) the young girl as the new season budding up, ready to burst out, as the symbol 'touch-me-not' specially suggests, 4) the lay figure as possibly the dead body of the old season, the rice and the millets being just in flower at that time of the year, and 5) the food offered as the expected *bhadvi*, new rice-crops.... But the loss of the spirit in the lay figure at midnight, the last day of the particular season of 'field-work,' the drowning of the lay-figure into the bowels of the Mother Earth, the sprinkling of sand and the skeins with sixteen knots—are symbolical of the simultaneous death and resurrection of the season, celebrated all over the world by primitive races, found here stereotyped into a Hinduised form. The sixteen knots and the sixteen folds of the skein, turned into a necklace, suggest the number of weeks a rice crop takes to grow.

The observations are interesting. The whole ritual is centered in the desire for a rich harvest. But no less important is the feature of the ritual which has completely escaped the comments of our author: the ritual, being agricultural, is thoroughly feminine. There is no place in it either for a male god or any male participant. Only the name of the male god remains grafted artificially. But Gupte, obviously misled by the suggestion

[3] *Ib.* xxxv. 62.

of this name, has tried in vain to connect the male god with the agricultural ritual. According to him, the iconography of Ganesa might have been suggested by the winnowing basket placed by the side of the sheaf of corn, or by the image of a peasant carrying a heap of harvest on the head.[4] These suggestions are fantastic and do not deserve serious criticism. More fantastic, however, is the over-enthusiastic comparison drawn by our author between Ganesa and certain agricultural deities of other parts of the world.

> The Indian Ganesa may in this matter be compared with the grain-goddess of Mexico, the Alo Alo of the Tonga Islands, the Demeter of Greece, or the Ceres of the Romans.[5]

A confusion of the sexes is involved in this comparison. Those with whom our old Ganesa is compared were but females. We shall see why they were logically so—why, in other words, with the discovery of agriculture the male deities were obliged to recede to the background. As a matter of fact, our author has himself observed this phenomenon in connection with the *Ganesa Caturthi Vrata*:

> In regard to the chief goddess, Gauri, the goddess of the harvest, one great peculiarity remains to be mentioned. She is supposed to have been followed secretly by her husband Siva, who remains hidden under the outer fold of her *sari* (garment), and is represented by a *lota* (pot), covered by a coconut and filled with rice.[6]

Obviously, the name Siva, like Gauri and Ganesa, are transplanted from the Puranic pantheon to this peasant-ritual. But the point is that when the ritual is essentially agricultural, the male god either quits the scene like Ganesa or, like Siva, is reduced to a very subordinate position.

Is there anything in the early stage of the agricultural economy that establishes the female principle in the ideological sphere?

2. Hunting, Agricultural, and Pastoral Tribes

Thomson[7] has suggested the following classification of the surviving tribes from the point of view of their economic development.

Lower Hunters: food-gathering and hunting.
Higher Hunters: hunting and fishing.

[4] *Ib.* 61.
[5] *Ib.*
[6] *Ib.* 63.
[7] SAGS i. 33.

Pastoral—two grades: in the second grade cattle-raising is supplemented by agriculture.

Agricultural—three grades: in the third grade, garden-tillage done with hoe is superseded by field-tillage done with the plough and agriculture is combined with cattle-raising.

We are asked to remember two points about this classification:

1) In the second pastoral and the third agricultural grades 'we find further progress in the handicrafts, permanent settlements, inter-tribal barter and metallurgy. At this level the tribal structure of society inherited from the lower grades, is beginning to break up.'

2) The categories do not 'constitute a fixed chronological sequence. Food-gathering and hunting have come first everywhere, but the higher grades depend on the local fauna and flora and other environmental factors.' Thus, after food-gathering and hunting, some of the peoples of the ancient times moved towards the pastoral economy while some others discovered agriculture. The advance in both the lines ultimately resulted in the breakdown of the tribal system. There had thus been two parallel paths of economic advance which led people to civilization.[8] We shall see the importance of this point for the understanding of the two fundamental trends of Indian culture, viz., the Vedic and the non-Vedic.

3. Social Importance of the Sexes

For the purpose of answering the question concerning the social importance of the male and the female in the lives of our remote ancestors, we may, in accordance with our method, look at the ethnological domain and see how far, among the surviving tribes, this feature is correlated to their economic lives.

The Todas of the Nilgiri Hills are a small community. Though their number is declining fast, they have aroused considerable ethnographical interest, because they alone represent a purely pastoral economy in India today.

> They are a purely pastoral people who eschew all other occupations. They are provided with the products of agriculture by the Badagas, a Canarese tribe who also live on the plateau, while the Kotas, allied to the jungle peoples of Southern India, furnish their metal work and pottery.[9]

[8] Cf. Engels OF 259 ff.

[9] ERE xii. 354.

Thus, according to our classification, they belong to the first grade of the pastoral economy.

In social organisation, they represent an extreme example of the superiority of the male.

Descent is always patrilineal. A man belongs to the clan of his father. The effect of fatherhood is not determined by marriage, however, but by a ceremony of giving a bow and arrow which takes place at the seventh month of pregnancy....The Todas practise poliandry, nearly always of the fraternal type. Formerly this practice was possible in a pure form owing to the existence of female infanticide. Though the girls are probably sometimes killed at birth, the practice is now less frequent.[10]

The Khasis of Assam form a considerably bigger community.

Their staple industry is agriculture, supplemented by hunting, fishing, and stock-raising. The principal crop is rice. Manuring is well understood, but in most parts of the country *the plough is unknown*.[11]

Thus, according to our economic classification the Khasis are to be placed before the third agricultural grade.

Their social organisation presents one of the most perfect examples still surviving of matriarchal institutions, carried out with a logic and thoroughness which, to those accustomed to regard the status and authority of the father as the foundation of society, are exceedingly remarkable. Not only is the mother the head and source and only bond of union of the family; in the most primitive part of the hills, the Synteng country, she is the only owner of real property, and through her alone is inheritance transmitted. The father has no kinship with his children, who belong to their mother's clan. What he earns goes to his own matriarchal stock, and at his death his bones are deposited in the cromlech of his mother's kin. In Jowai he neither lives nor eats in his wife's house, but visits it only after dark. In the veneration of ancestors, which is the foundation of tribal piety, the primal ancestress and her brother are the only persons regarded. The flat memorial stones set up to perpetuate the memory of the dead are called after the woman who represents the clan, and the standing stones ranged behind them are dedicated to the male kinsmen on the mother's side. In harmony with this scheme of ancestor-worship the other spirits to whom propitiation is offered are mainly female, though here male personages also figure. The powers of sickness and death are all female, and these are the most frequently worshipped. The two protectors of the household are goddesses, though with them is also revered the first father of the clan. Priestesses assist at all sacrifices, and the male officients are only their deputies. In one important state, Khyrim, the high-priestess and actual head of the state is a woman, who combines in her person sacerdotal and regal functions.[12]

The examples of the Todas and the Khasis would be particularly important for our studies because these illustrate that

[10] *Ib.* [11] Thomson SAGS i. 151. Italics added.
[12] Lyall quoted by Gurdon K xix-xx.

the *pastoral economy is correlated to the social supremacy of the male while the early agricultural economy to that of the female.*

Let us now go back to the still earlier stage of social development. According to Majumdar's[13] economic gradation, the following tribes of India are still in the 'hunting and collectional stage': Raji (U.P.); Kharia and Birhor (Bihar); Kuki and Konyaks (Assam); Hill Maria (C.P.); Koya, Conta-Reddi, Paliyan, Kadar, Hill Pantaram (Madras and Hyderabad); Juang (Orissa). Among them the patrilineal mode of descent preponderates.[14]

Other examples of hunting tribes are to be found in Australia and a high proportion of them are patrilineal.[15] Nevertheless, certain practices are observed among them that point to their matrilineal past.

> In two widely separated Australian tribes, of which we happen to be exceptionally well informed, we find an elaborate code of regulations requiring the married men to hand over the whole or the best part of their catch to their wives' parents. Similar rules are common in other parts of the world. They point to a state of society in which the men went to live with the clan to which their wives belonged—a matrilineal clan centred in the women.[16]

Bearing all these in mind, we may now proceed to consider the general question concerning the economic basis of mother-right.

4. Mother-Right

Mother-right has been defined by Rivers[17] as

> a form of social organisation in which the rights of a person in relation to the other members of his community and to the community as a whole are determined by relationship traced through the mother. In this condition the duties which a person owes to society, the privileges which he enjoys and the restrictions to which he is subject are regulated, and their scope is determined, by the relations in which the person stands to his mother's relatives and his mother's social group.

Rivers has mentioned the following as constituting its chief elements: descent, kinship, inheritance, succession, authority, marriage. The condition of mother-right in its most typical form occurs very rarely, being found mainly among the Khasis

[13] RCI 106.
[14] E.g. Haimendorf ATH ii. 161, 331.
[15] Thomson SAGS i. 42-3.
[16] *Ib.* i. 43.
[17] ERE viii. 851.

of Assam and certain tribes of North America (the Iroquois and the Seri Indians). In other cases, only one or the other element of the organisation is prominent.

In the last century, following Bachofen, the ethnologists were unanimous that mother-right represented the original form of social organisation. This view is vigorously contested by many contemporary authorities though they are without any agreed positive alternative. In recent years, Briffault, on the basis of vast data, has reaffirmed the old view, though not without introducing important modifications in it.[18]

The evidences mentioned by most of the authorities on both sides are largely of the nature of the extant cases of transition from one mode to the other. Such evidences clearly indicate the priority of the mother-right. As Rivers,[19] one of the contemporary critics of the old view, has admitted:

> In several parts of the world we have definite evidence that a condition of mother-right has changed either into one of father-right or into a form of social organisation in which social rights are recognised with the relatives of both father and mother. Thus there is evidence that some form of mother-right once existed in Europe, while in the Sudan there is historical proof that five hundred years ago the Beja, who are now definitely patrilineal, kept their genealogies in the female line, and transmitted property to the sons of sister or daughter. In Melanesia, again, and in some parts of America, there is positive evidence of a change from matrilineal to patrilineal institutions, the transition being still in progress in some parts of Melanesia. On the other hand, there is *no unequivocal evidence from any part of the world of a change having taken place in the opposite direction.*

Strangely, however, the same author, in the same article, made the following comment:

> But, while it is almost certain that by far the most frequent process throughout the world has been a transition from mother- to father-right, *the reverse change may have occurred.*[20]

However, what the author has cited as probable examples of the process of reverse change is not such a process as is actually observed to have taken place, but rather the fact that certain obviously backward tribes have very clear father-right elements in their social organisation, whereas, certain other and comparatively more advanced tribes have social organisations strongly characterised by mother-right elements. Rivers has mentioned the evidence of the North American tribes:

[18] Thomson SAGS i. 43.
[19] ERE viii. 858. Italics added.
[20] *Ib.* Italics added.

Not only do some of its matrilineal peoples, such as the Iroquois and the Pueblo Indians, possess the most advanced cultures of the continent, but, where one people, such as the Dene or northern Athapascans, practise both lines of descent, it is the less cultured, who use the patrilineal mode.[21]

Such evidences are important. We have seen in the previous section that father-right elements are not uncommon among the hunting tribes, whereas the Khasis, at some developed agricultural stage (though prior to the introduction of cattle-drawn plough) represent the most typical example of mother-right.

What the ethnologists of the last century, as well as our contemporary critics of them, have overlooked is the economic basis of the social domination of the sexes. We shall quote Thomson[22] on the correlation of the two:

In the pre-hunting stage there was no production, only simple appropriation of seeds, fruits, and small animals, and consequently there was no division of labour.

Such a condition is conducive to the social superiority of the female. For, since there was no production, there was no question of the superiority of any from the point of view of production, whereas, it was on the women that rested the supremely important function of rearing up the young and of imparting to them whatever could be characterised as human heritage at this stage.

There are two types of natural relations, sexual and parental, and among the higher animals they tend to be mutually exclusive. The female is averse to sexual intercourse during gestation and lactation, and the male plays little or no part in feeding and tending the young. This is true of the mammals in general, including the apes, and, if it was also true of man's apelike ancestors, it follows that the advance from imitation to co-operation was effected by the development of parental relations, and, more particularly, of the relations between mothers and their offspring. It may be suggested, therefore, that one condition for the development of production was the extension and transformation of those habits of co-operation, based on imitation, which characterised the relations between mothers and offspring in the transition from ape to man. *In man the maternal relation*, which among the apes is replaced at maturity by the sexual, *was gradually prolonged until it comprehended all members of the group in a non-sexual, social relationship.* In this way they acquired a sense of kinship, a consciousness of mutual obligations and attachments springing from the natural affinity between a mother and her children. Thus, there is real truth in the Khasi proverb, 'From the woman sprang the clan.'[23]

So, the earliest form of the social organisation was centred

[21] *Ib.*
[22] SAGS i. 41-2.
[23] Ib. ii. 42-3. Italics added.

round the mother and this state of affairs persisted for a long period of time. From this point of view, the ethonologists of the last century were right in insisting that mother-right was characteristic of the earliest form of human society. Yet their view needs to be substantially modified for they overlooked the subsequent shifts in the social superiority of the sexes that took place as a result of the development and changes in the technique of production. We shall quote Thomson[24] at length.

> With the invention of the spear, however, hunting became the men's task, while the women continued the work of food-gathering. This sexual division of labour is universal in hunting tribes, being due to the relative immobility of women during pregnancy and lactation.
>
> Hunting led to the domestication of animals. Instead of being killed the game was brought home alive and kept. Accordingly cattle-raising is almost everywhere men's work. On the other hand, food-gathering led to the cultivation of seeds in plots adjacent to the settlement, and so garden tillage is women's work. Then, after the introduction of the cattle-drawn plough, agriculture was transferred to the men. In parts of Africa, where the plough is only a recent acquisition, the change-over can be seen taking place at the present day.
>
> These shifting tensions in the relations of the sexes to the mode of production explain the rise of patrilineal descent. The process began with hunting, and was intensified by cattle-raising, but in the initial phase of agriculture it was reversed.
>
> How, it has been asked, if descent was originally matrilineal, has it come about that some of the most backward peoples reckon through the father, while others, more advanced, retain the older form? The answer is that the sexual division of labour characteristic of a hunting economy is such as to impart to that economy an inherent tendency to patrilineal descent. The reason why so high a proportion of modern hunting tribes are patrilineal is that their economic life has been arrested at that level. Conversely, when we find, as we shall find, that in the pre-history of civilized peoples matrilineal descent persisted to a much higher stage than the ethnological data might lead us to expect, the explanation is that these peoples passed rapidly through hunting to agriculture.

To sum up. The social importance of the sexes is correlated to the development of the economic life. The original pre-hunting stage was characterised by mother-right. With the development of hunting, however, the social supremacy was shifted to male. In the post-hunting stage, among those peoples that developed the pastoral economy this male-supremacy came to exercise even greater hold; among those, however, that discovered agriculture, the situation was reversed. There was a revival of mother-right among them. With the further development of

[24] *Ib*. i. 42-3.

agriculture,—more specifically, with the introduction of the cattle-drawn plough to the field—this agricultural mother-right was finally overthrown.

Gods and goddesses are after all created in human image; these shifts in the social importance of the sexes were naturally reflected in the form of parallel shifts in the celestial sphere. Deities representing the hunting and the pastoral stages are predominantly male whereas those representing the earlier stages of agriculture were predominantly female. We are going to argue that we have here the clues to the Vedic as well as the non-Vedic outlooks.

5. Purusa-Sukta and Pastoral Economy

That the economic life of the early Vedic peoples was predominantly pastoral is a point on which practically all the authorities are unanimous. Even as late as the times of the *Upanisads*,[25] the sages were counting their wealth mainly in terms of the cattle. We shall, in Chapter VIII, briefly review the early Vedic literatures, particularly the *Rig Veda*, and see how the desire for cattle and more cattle dominated the whole of it. For the present, it may suffice our purpose to refer to some competent opinions.

Following are the observations of Winternitz:[26]

> Rice — later the chief product of agriculture and the staple food of the Indians—is still quite unknown to the *Rig Veda*. Only barley is planted, and at the time of the hymns agriculture as yet played only a small part. The chief source of income was cattle-rearing, and the chief cattle was the bullock.... Again and again in the songs and invocations to the gods, the prayer for cattle and horses occurs. Also the strife amongst the hostile aboriginal inhabitants turns on the possession of cattle. Therefore, too, the old word for 'war' or 'battle' is originally 'desire for cattle' (*gavisti*). In the most extravagant expressions cows and bullocks are praised as the most precious possessions. The lowing of cows hastening to the calves is looked on by the ancient Indian as the sweetest music. 'The singers are shouting to the god Indra,' says a poet, 'as mother cows low to the calf.' Gods are readily compared with bullocks, goddesses with cows. The milk of the cow was not only one of the chief articles of food, but milk and butter formed an essential part of the sacrifices to the gods. The milk was by preference consumed warm as it came from the cow, and Vedic poets marvel at the miracle that the 'raw' cow gives cooked milk.

Similar observations may be quoted from the writings of the other scholars.[27] But that is not necessary. It is, as a matter of

[25] The point is rather well known. E.g. *Ch. Up.* iv. 4. 5.
[26] HIL i. 64-5.
[27] E.g. Macdonell HSL 166.

fact, a commonplace of Vedic scholarship to assert that the Vedic peoples, particularly in their earlier days, were predominantly pastoral. Agriculture not only played a secondary role in the Vedic economy; it was actually looked down upon in the Vedic tradition. The pastoral peoples had an aversion for agriculture.[28] Mitra[29] thought that the contempt of the Vedic people for the Zoroastrians arose from the same source. As it is well known, according to Manu,[30] agriculture was forbidden to the Brahmanas. Baudhayana,[31] too, found real contradiction between agriculture and the study of the *Vedas*.

> It was as a society of pastoral warriors that they (i.e., the Vedic people) established themselves in the fertile plains of Northern India; they never took up the cultivation of the soil, leaving it to the native inhabitants; and, indeed, they, like all pastoral warriors, profoundly despised agriculture as the occupation of conquered races.[32]

The pastoral economy has a natural tendency towards a social organisation in which the males dominate. We have seen the example of the Todas, the only surviving pastoral tribe in India which is also highly patriarchal. There is, in fact, no pastoral people which is not patriarchal for 'cattle-raising is almost everywhere men's work.'[33]

> Definite economic power was first placed in the hands of men by the domestication of animals, which are always regarded as appertaining to the province of the hunter, and by the development of pastoral societies. That power has commonly been used to buy off the claims of women and of their families to the allegiance and services of husbands; women are purchased for cattle, and patriarchal society with patrilocal marriage becomes inevitably established among pastoral peoples.[34]

We are, at the moment specifically interested in the question of how this social superiority of the male among the Vedic peoples, resulting from their pastoral economy, was reflected in the Vedic pantheon.

> Goddesses occupy a very subordinate position in Vedic belief and worship. They play hardly any part as rulers of the world. The only one of any importance is Usas, who judged by the statistical standard ranks as a deity of the third class. But, unlike nearly all the gods, she received no share in the Soma offering. Next to her comes Sarasvati, who, however, only ranks with the lowest class

28 Briffault M. iii. 59, 111.
29 Mitra IA Article xx: 'Primitive Aryans.'
30 SBE xxv. 86, 106ff., 420ff.
31 i. 5. 101.
32 Briffault M iii. 59.
33 SAGS i. 42.
34 Briffault M ii. 251.

of deities. A few other goddesses are praised in one hymn each. Prithivi, hardly separable from Dyaus, is praised in one short hymn of three stanzas. Ratri (night) is also invoked in one hymn. Like her sister Dawn, she is called the daughter of heaven.... Vak (personified speech) is celebrated in one hymn....

Goddesses as wives of the great gods similarly play an insignificant part in the *Veda*. They are altogether without independent character, simply representing the spouses whom such gods as Indra must have had. Hardly anything about them is mentioned but their names, which are simply formed from those of the gods with the feminine suffix—*ani*.[35]

Like the pastoral economy of the Vedic peoples, the male-domination of the Vedic pantheon is the fact too well known to be elaborately argued.[36] What needs to be argued, however, is that the former was the material basis of the latter.

Of course, the Vedic literature is vast. It took many centuries for the Vedic poets to compose the whole of the *Rig Veda* itself. During this period, the consciousness of the Vedic peoples, like their social organisation, did advance. It was, however, an advance within the general structure of the male-dominated thinking.

Our scholars have characterised the advance of Vedic thinking as an unconscious groping towards monotheism and monism.[37] This may be true. What is not true, however, is their assertion that the fundamental principle of the One arrived at by the later poets of the *Rig Veda* was without any character of sex.

Whatever is the age when the collection of the *Rig Veda Samhita* was finished, it was before that age that the conviction had been formed that there is but One, One Being, neither male nor female, a Being raised high above all the conditions and limitations of personality and of human nature....[38]

Radhakrishnan[39] added:

They applied to the central principle the neuter term Sat, to show that it is above sex. ...In some of the advanced hymns of the *Rig Veda* the Supreme is indifferently called Her or It.

That there are passages in the comparatively later portions of the Vedic literature which use the neuter gender to refer to the ultimate reality, need not be denied.[40] What needs to be

[35] Macdonell VM 124-5.

[36] Bhandarkar VS 142; Crooke in F xxx. 284 ff. Kosambi has discussed the survivals of the archaic mother-right in the Vedic literatures JBBRAS xxvi. 69n, 70 ff.

[37] Radhakrishnan IP i. 91 ff.

[38] Max Muller SSIP 51.

[39] IP i. 94, 96.

[40] x. 129.

affirmed, however, is that even these passages do not prove that the Vedic thinkers outgrew the limits of male-dominated thinking. The decisive evidence is furnished by the *Purusa-Sukta*,[41] which belongs to the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*. Following is an extract from this:

A thousand heads hath *purusa*, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.
On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.
This *purusa* is all that yet hath been and all that is to be.
The lord of immortality which waxes greater still by food.
So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is *purusa*.
All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.
With three-fourths *purusa* went up: one-fourth of him again was here.
Thence he strode out to every side over what eats not and what eats.

It needs only to be remembered that *purusa* simply means the male. If, therefore, there had been any specimen of thinking completely dominated by the idea of the supremacy of the male, we have it in our Vedic literature. Our scholars, often over-anxious to attribute to our remote ancestors a gift for unfettered free-thinking, have, almost invariably, ignored the literal meaning of the word. The question is never asked why in this famous hymn the entire cosmic order was conceived in terms of the original male. Yet the question is relevant and even important, because it is precisely here that the Vedic tradition sharply differed from the non-Vedic—or, more specifically, the Tantrika—tradition, which conceived the cosmic order in terms of the original female. The fact is that the speculations of the Vedic peoples, like the speculations of the other mortals, could not outgrow the general structure basically determined by their economic life. The *Purusa-Sukta* did represent some stage of the development of abstract thinking. But it was after all the abstract thinking of the predominantly pastoral people, who, living as they did in patriarchal society, could not think except in terms of the supremacy of the male.

What is probably not less striking about the Vedic literatures is that in the comparatively few places where agriculture is referred to, the deities connected with it are generally conceived as females. In the *Rig Veda*,[42] we come across the following invocation to the goddess Sita, literally the furrow:

Bountiful Sita, be present, we glorify thee that thou mayest be the giver of abundant wealth to us, that thou mayest yield abundant fruit.

41 *R.V.* x. 90. 42 iv. 57. 6-7.

May Indra take hold of Sita, may Pusan guide her; may she, well stored with water, yield it as milk, year after year.

Sita here is made subordinate to the male gods like Indra and Pusan. But that is only to be expected. This subordination of the female deity corresponds to that of the agricultural economy of the Vedic people. What is significant, however, is the fact that being an agricultural deity she is conceived as a female.

'The figure of this goddess,' Keith[43] observed, 'naturally has more life in the *Sutras,* which deal with the operations of agriculture.' Separated from the *Rig Veda* by a considerable time-gap, the *Sutras* mention other deities connected with agriculture, who, significantly, are all females. The *Gobhila Grihya Sutra*[44] referred to Sita, Asa, Arada, Anagha. They were to be invoked at the rituals of furrowing, of sowing the seeds and of reaping the harvest. Again, the *Paraskara Grihya Sutra*[45] referred to the goddesses Urvara, Sita, Yaja, Sama and Bhuti. They were all connected with the agricultural operations and they were all females.

Referring to such female deities Keith[46] commented:

It would of course be absurd to suppose that these scanty remnants of worship represent the whole of the agricultural side of Vedic religion, and as a matter of fact in the ritual there are abundant traces of other ceremonies having to do with agriculture, but the deities of the field were evidently as such not of great importance in Vedic religion, the care of the prosperity of men in these respects having been taken over by the great gods. When agricultural and vegetation spirits as such have great honour among and importance in the ideas of a people, then their figures are elevated to the rank of the great deities, as is the case with Attis, Adonis, or perhaps even Osiris in the lands of Asia Minor and of Egypt, and the fact that other deities are the great gods of Vedic religion *cannot be explained on any other hypothesis than that the specific religious instinct of the Vedic people chose these forms as the favourite objects of its devotions.*

This hypothesis is worthless. The point is quite simple and obvious. Agriculture did not have that importance in the Vedic economy which it had in Asia Minor or Egypt. There was, therefore, no reason for the agricultural deities of the Vedic literatures to acquire any great prominence. Besides, it is really amazing how easily the scholar has overlooked the great goddesses while speaking of the religions of Asia Minor and Egypt. But more of this later.

43 RPV 186.
44 iv. 4. 29. SBE xxx. 113.
45 ii. 17. 10. SBE xxix. 334.
46 RPV 187. Italics added.

6. Iconographical Incongruities

In the Vedic age, there were pastoral tribes outside the Vedic circle. Radhakrishnan[47] has mentioned the example of the Krisnas. According to the *Rig Veda*,[48] these Krisnas were defeated by the Vedic peoples under the leadership of Indra. The 'deified hero' of the tribe was also called Krisna. Significantly, he was a male.

Similarly, Bhandarkar[49] has suggested that Rudra of the *Rig Veda* might have originally been the deity of the hunting tribes (the Nisadas), though, according to him, they were not necessarily purely non-Vedic. What is relevant for our argument is that he, too, was a male.

But we need not go to the Vedic literatures to see the correlation between the hunting economy and a male deity; our old Ganapati may, in a sense, serve the purpose.

The clue is to be found in his *ayudhas*. The gods of our pantheon are not empty-handed; they hold some emblem or other in their hands. These are the *ayudhas*, literally, weapons.

> The various weapons and emblems,....which are generally found in the hands of the images of Visnu, Siva and other gods are personified under the name of *Ayudha Purusas*.[50]

But the personifications are obviously arbitrary, for the 'sex of a personified *ayudha* is ... determined merely with reference to the gender of its name in Sanskrit.'[51]

Later writers tried to attribute to the *ayudhas* spiritual significance drawn from the stock of their own later ideas. This naturally resulted in much confusions and contradictions, specimens of which have been quoted by Rao,[52] who himself, in a kind of despair, has observed:

> Thus we may see that, in relation of these various weapons and emblems found in the hands of the images of Hindu gods and goddesses there is a consensus of opinion showing that the early Hindus had probably a systematised symbolism as appertaining to their iconographic art in its application to religion. The key to this symbology is evidently lost and cannot be easily recovered.... Till this lost key is recovered ... nothing more than making mere guess in the dark regarding the meaning and moral aim of Hindu icons is really possible.[53]

But there is probably no reason to take such a gloomy view. For the original significance of at least some of the

47 IP i. 87. 48 *RV* viii. 96. 13.
49 VS 103-4. 50 Rao EHI i. i. 287-8.
51 *Ib.* 52 *Ib.* i. i. 293. 53 *Ib.* i. i. 295-6.

ayudhas can possibly be recovered, provided we do not allow our visions to be clouded by the later and arbitrary speculations.

From the iconographical point of view Ganapati had a large variety of forms—no less than a dozen and half—having a distinct name for each. Some of these, like the Vala Ganapati or Bhakti Vighnesvara Ganapati are obviously very late while the others, like Unmatta Ucchista Ganapati or the Nritya Ganapati, are genuinely old.

However, the point to be specially noted is that whenever the image of Ganapati is not too modern, we find him holding in his hands the two *ayudhas* called the *pasa,* and *ankusa.* The former means the noose, the latter the elephant-goad. These are to be found in the hands of the Taruna Ganapati, Vira Vighnesvara Ganapati, Laksmi Ganapati, Prasanna Ganapati, Unmatta Ucchista Ganapati, Vighnaraja Ganapati, Bhuvanesa Ganapati, Nritya Ganapati, Haridra Ganapati and others.[54]

So it may reasonably be presumed that the noose and the elephant-goad were the original *ayudhas* of Ganapati. If we ask the simple question, what could Ganapati have been doing with these two well known hunting implements,—more particularly the implement for elephant-hunting—there would be only one answer to it: Ganapati was himself engaged in the act of hunting. His totemic origin testified by his elephant-head confirms the point: totemism is the ideology characteristic of the hunting stage.[55] Further, in some of his forms—particularly in the forms known as Vira Vighnesvara and Urdhva Ganapati—he is seen to hold even the bow and arrow,[56] patently hunting implements again. In his origin, therefore, Ganapati could only be the deity of the hunting tribes. And, as is to be expected from the point of view of our argument, he was a male.

However, as we have already seen while discussing the *Ganesa Caturthi Vrata,* the male deity either quits the scene or is reduced to an obviously secondary position when it is specifically a question of the agricultural ritual. In the images of Ganapati, we come across a different manifestation of the same phenomenon: the male deity of the hunting stage is brought

[54] *Ib.* i. i. 52-9.

[55] It may be significant, in this connection, to remember Thomson's theory of the totem-species being originally the specialised diet of the clan. The taboo eventually imposed on the eating of the totem-species is explained by him as the measure to ensure the economic interdependence of the clans. AA 12-3. SAGS i. 37-8.

[56] Rao EHI i. i. 52, 56.

forward to the agricultural stage no doubt, but this could be effected only at the cost of such basic iconographical inconsistencies as almost to negate his male sex. The point is interesting and we may look into it rather carefully.

Among the *ayudhas* of the Vala Ganapati, we find the mango, banana and other fruits. The Taruna Ganapati carries among other things the wood-apple and the jambu fruit. The Bhakti Vighnesvara Ganapati has the coconut, mango, lump of sugar, etc. as his *ayudhas*. Conspicuous among the *ayudhas* of Laksmi Ganapati are the pomegranate, lotus, water-vessel and the *Kalpakalata* (the wish-fulfilling plant), etc. Similarly, the lotus and the pomegranate, along with the ears of paddy, are to be seen in the hands of Maha Ganapati.[57]

It is not necessary to multiply the instances. The point is that all these are agricultural products and so try to connect Ganapati with the agricultural occupation. In trying to do so, however, these create contradictions and inconsistencies. We shall concentrate specially on one of these. It consists in the circumstance of the male god holding a pomegranate in his hand.

This pomegranate is not at all an uncommon *ayudha* of the deities of the Greek pantheon. But those who held it there were all goddesses, not gods. And this is only logical. We shall quote Thomson[58] to see the logic of it.

> Demeter was constantly portrayed as holding in her hand a poppy or a pomegranate or both. The image of Victory Athena at Athens had a helmet in the right hand and a pomegranate in the left. At Olympia there was a statue of the athlete Milon holding a pomegranate. Milon was a priest of Hera. Hera's statue at Argos had a sceptre in one hand and a pomegranate in the other. In referring to it Pausanias remarks: 'I will say no more about the pomegranate because the story connected with it is in the nature of a secret.' What was the secret?
>
> The fruit of the pomegranate is a brilliant red. So is the seed (*kokkos*) which by yielding a common dye gave Greek its word for scarlet (*kokkinos*). The pomegranate was a sign of blood. That is generally understood, but the real meaning of the sign has been missed. It has usually been regarded as a symbol of violent death. That is undoubtedly what it means in particular case.... But these applications are secondary. The pomegranate was used medicinally for menstruation and pregnancy, and this shows that in the hands of Demeter it had the same value as the poppy, which is expressly described as a symbol of fecundity. In the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Arcadian Mysteries of Despoina (Persephone) it was taboo, in allusion to a well known incident in the story of Persephone.... At

[57] *Ib*. i. i. 55.

[58] SAGS i. 219-20.

Athens the women who kept the Thesmophoria were required to abstain from pomegranates and from sexual intercourse. Each night they slept on beds of withy, which had the double virtue of checking the sexual impulse and scaring away snakes. Since they used the withy as an antidote to sexual activity, we must suppose that they avoided the pomegranate because it was a stimulant. Its colour was not primarily the blood of battle but the blood of fertility—menstrual and lochial blood.

It remains for us to see the importance attributed to the menstrual blood in primitive ideas, particularly in the ideas characteristic of the early agricultural stage. However, it is at present sufficient for us to note, that, assuming such symbolic significances to be universal which these certainly were, pomegranate being used as an *ayudha* of Ganapati makes obviously a case for the most grotesque inconsistencies. The male god was dabbling in the female matters. It was all right for him to be a male and be connected with the hunting economy; but not so with the agricultural. When he wanted, as it were, to be connected with the latter he had to borrow the characteristics and secrets of the other sex.

We may notice more manifestation of the same fundamental inconsistency in the later ideas of our old Ganapati. Efforts in various ways were made to associate him with the colour of the blood. According to the *Mantramaharnava*,[59] the image of Ganapati should be red like blood. In the *Tantrasara*[60] we come across such epithets as 'red as the vermilion,' 'wearing clothes of the colour of blood' in the meditations on Ganapati. According to Colebrooke,[61] 'the distinguishing sectarian mark of the Ganapatyas was a circlet of red minium on the forehead.' The scarlet flower *jaba* (china-rose) is called 'the flower of Ganesa.'[62] Vermilion powder, again, is called the 'cosmetic of Ganesa.'[63] On the bank of the Narmada, near Ganesa-Kunda, there is a piece of red stone called the Ganesa-stone.[64] Kane[65] has said that five kinds of stone were used in worship, of which the one used in the worship of Ganesa was red.

What was the real significance of all these? Why was it conceived that Ganapati was intimately connected with red? What did the colour stand for? The author of *Samkara Vijaya*[66] gave us the clue to these questions. For he clearly told us that the menstrual blood played a decisive role in the rituals of the

[59] *VK* (B) v. 203.
[60] *Ganesamantrah* ch. ii. Verse 63. 4.
[61] ERE vi. 176.
[62] *VK* (B) v. 206.
[63] *Ib.* v. 208.
[64] *Ib.* v. 205.
[65] HD ii. 716.
[66] Ch. xvii. p. 115.

followers of Ganapati. Evidently, the red with which Ganapati was thus variously associated was the symbol of the same. We shall see this point more clearly in Chapter V. This symbolic significance of the red colour had been universal in ancient cultures. Thomson, on the basis of an enormously vast heap of evidences collected by Briffault, has in fact conclusively argued this point.

For the moment it is sufficient for us to note that if this be the real significance of the colour, it is hardly consistent for our male god to be anointed with it. It was the same inconsistency he exhibited by holding a pomegranate in his hand. The male god was getting involved in matters pertaining to the female.

From this point of view, it was probably more consistent for him to retire from the agricultural scene, as he did in the *Ganesa Caturthi Vrata,* leaving the ritual to be performed by the women centred round a female figure. Perhaps the other way for him was to take shelter behind the female. As a matter of fact, we find him doing this in certain cases. In the cave of Ellora, Ganesa is to be seen not by himself but as subservient to the seven women, called the seven mothers (*sapta matrikas*).[67] In some other cases, we find a young lady usually sitting on his lap and being amorously embraced by him. She is called the Sakti and such icons of Ganesa are known as the Sakti Ganapatis.[68] We shall later see how, in such sculptural representations in which the male god is associated with Sakti, he is reduced to the secondary position, however much the icon-makers might have disregarded this proportional importance of the male and the female.

7. Agriculture: The Discovery of Women

Thus there were reverses in the celestial plane in the superiority of sexes at the initial stage of agriculture. The female moved forward and the male was either pushed to the background or, at least, made to imitate the female. All these were logical. The initial stage of agriculture witnessed the social superiority of the women. For agriculture was women's invention. Observed Bernal.[69]

> As grain-gathering was women's business agriculture was probably a women's *invention,* and in any case was women's work,

[67] Getty G *pl* 2 (c).
[68] Rao EHI i. i. 53.
[69] Bernal SIH 60-1.

at least till the invention of the ox-drawn hoe or plough, for it was done with the *hoe*, a derivative of the old stone age *digging stick* with which women used to grub for roots. Where agriculture predominated over hunting in providing food it accordingly raised the status of women and halted and reversed the tendency to change the reckoning of descent through the mother (*matrilineal*), to that through the father (*patrilineal*) which hunting had first induced. Only where stock-raising predominated, as in the lands bordering the agricultural settlements, was there a complete transition to the patriarchy—as we see it in the Bible.

Giles,[70] in his contribution to the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, argued the same point:

> Primitive agriculture is not altogether nor to any large extent in the hands of males. As Von Den Steinen remarks of the Bakairi of Central Brazil, it is woman that has invented agriculture.... Dibbling with a pointed stick and hoeing with a stone axe were possible for the women and children in the neighbourhood of the huts, while the men wandered farther afield as hunters or on the war path. Hence agriculture reaches an advanced stage, before the women hand over the greater part of the operations to the men.... Hence, with the development of the plough and of a system of tillage, agriculture of necessity passed more into the hands of men. More over, when a pastoral people turns to agriculture, it objects to women having to do with the cattle.

Added Briffault:

> In the primitive division of labour the gathering and the cultivation of vegetable food are the special occupation of the women as hunting is that of the men. The yam-digging stick is among the Australian aborigines as inseparable and personal a part of the woman as weapons are appurtenances of the men. The art of cultivation has developed exclusively in the hands of women. The invention of agriculture by woman is commemorated in savage myth.[71]
>
> Where agriculture, which from the first has been the province of women, has developed on an important scale without any intervening pastoral stage, the matriarchal order has often persisted and has even become accentuated in relatively advanced phases of culture. ... This happened notably in Egypt, which owed its wealth and culture to the Nile and to the fields which it fertilised, and where pastoral property never attained to any degree of importance.[72]

8. Mother-Right in India

Agriculture thus was the invention of women. Therefore, the initial phase of agricultural economy witnessed the social superiority of the female.

But questions may still be asked with regard to the specific

[70] ERE i. 227-8.
[71] Briffault M iii. 2.
[72] *Ib*. ii. 251-2.

case of Indian history. We have already observed the example of the Khasis and have seen how they represent a comparatively undeveloped agricultural technique along with mother-right in its typical form. 'Matriarchal institutions,' Kosambi[73] has observed, 'still survive in those parts of the country that took last to the plough economy, e.g. Travancore-Cochin and among some tribesmen.' However, further questions are obviously involved. Was agriculture, in India, the discovery of women? Was this discovery really connected with the social superiority of the female? Ehrenfels has already answered the questions.

> Women here not only invented systematic tilling of the soil, but also put this into practice, which can by no means have been an easy task, as conservatism was so strong in primitive society, specially in the primeval culture-circle, that some remnants of these pre-agricultural groups have been preserved to the present day. In consequence of the tilling of the soil the peoples of this first matriarchal culture-circle gave up roaming in the forest and became the first settlers.[74]

The author has indeed gone a step further and asserted that a primitive form of agriculture, and along with it a form of mother-right first developed originally in India.

> The mutual *relations* between *Indian* and *non-Indian mother-right cultures* are manifold. The general geographical and also the archaeological situation favours the theory that the world-cultures of mother-right originally emanated from India.[75]

So, it was the Indian mother-right which

> appears to have created the ancient matriarchal civilizations in the Mediterranean Basin, Oriental Africa, the Near East and specially Southern Arabia.[76]

This hypothesis of India being the original home of mother-right and, therefore, of the migration of mother-right from India to the other centres of the ancient world, may of course be disputed. If mother-right be originally due to the invention of agriculture by the women, as Ehrenfels has repeatedly accepted it to have been, then it is quite conceivable that the other peoples of the world, under similar circumstances, i.e., because of similar inventions, might have developed the same or similar institution. Nevertheless, this consideration does not at all minimise the importance of the contribution of our author to the question of mother-right in India. The Index of the Caste-Register[77] which he has so laboriously prepared goes to

73 ISIH 22. 74 MRI 8.
75 *Ib.* 204. 76 *Ib.* 77 *Ib.* 18-35.

show how strong and widespread are the surviving 'matriarchal culture elements' among the peoples of India. Indeed, a predominantly agricultural country like India, with her stunted economic development accounting for the strong survivals of the tribal elements, is only likely to be full of relics of mother-right. In the North-East, among the Khasis and Garos, and in the South-West among the Nayars of the Malabar Coast, the survival of mother-right may be particularly strong; but, as Ehrenfels has shown, there are a number of more primitive tribes, living mainly on *jhuming*-cultivation (the author's U-group), who present a more primitive form of mother-right:

> Many of their mother-right elements are found to have been taken over from the surrounding matriarchal peoples who belong to more progressive social units. Still it is possible, perhaps even probable, that the beginning of a mother-right civilization, though a very primitive one, was constituted within the U-group long before any influence by other communities could have taken place.[78]

More important than all these are the observations of Ehrenfels on the violent overthrow of the original mother-right among the vast masses of the Indian peasant-population. The abrupt and essentially artificial way in which the overthrow took place did result, according to him, in the 'three typically Indian institutions,' namely, hypergamy, child-marriage and *sati* (burning of widows).

Summing up the evidences on hypergamy, Ehrenfels concluded:

> The principle of hypergamy in India finds its best explanation in the desire of an immigrating, patriarchally organised society, to force the idea of the superiority of men on the women, whose spirit of independence and self-confidence was rooted in the old tradition of a matriarchally organised society. Hypergamy thus seems a means to subdue the female position in society by forcing upon her social inferiority in matrimonial relations.[79]

But the question is why, in India, such extravagant means of breaking the resistance of matriarchy was called for, parallels of which are

> scarcely to be found anywhere else in human history, though contention between patriarchal and matriarchal principles has so often existed in the course of human civilization.[80]

The author has sought the answer in 'the special vigour and development of the matriarchal civilization in pre-Aryan India';[81]

[78] *Ib.* 201.
[79] *Ib.* 121.
[80] *Ib.*
[81] *Ib.* 125.

it was this which 'yielded such a strong opposition to the patriarchal tendencies of the Aryan new-comers',[82] and called forth such extravagant methods to destroy it.

Similar is the explanation of child-marriage:

> The prevalence of infant-marriage in India, compared to other countries, where a struggle between father-right and mother-right has also taken place, is subject to the same explanation as the one which was given with regard to hypergamy.[83]

However, the most violent form of this extravagant method of depriving the women of their former importance is exemplified by the contempt for the widow.

> This picture of the progressive decay of women's position in India betrays the clearly visible tendency to humiliate them before men, a tendency which is practised in excess in the treatment of widows.[84]

Ehrenfels quoted Russell to illustrate the position of widows:

> (A widow is often forced to) shave her head and is usually forbidden to have a cot or bed, and must sleep on the ground or on a plank. She must not chew betel leaves, should eat only once a day, and must rigorously observe all the prescribed fasts. She wears white clothes only, no glass bangles and no ornaments on her feet. She is subject to other restrictions and is a general drudge in the family. ... Hindus say that a widow is half-dead. She should not be allowed to cook the household food ... a widow is not permitted to worship the household-god or the ancestors of the family ... a widow should not claim any life-interest in her husband's property....[85]

Ehrenfels has rightly added the following:

> *Sati,* or burning the widow together with the husband's body, is, under these conditions only one step further, if we take into consideration that life without any occupaion, besides the humiliating ones, without any aim, purpose or happiness, suppressed not only by the superstitious fear, but often hatred of the whole family, had to be faced by the widow who refused to commit *sati,* whereas this self-sacrifice in the burning flames was considered not only to bring honour and glory on the name of the whole family, but also eternal happiness to the soul of the suicided woman.[86]

Thus,

> ... the bad position of the widow, intensified to the extreme in the custom of burning her alive with the body of the deceased husband, originally foreign to the pre-Aryan, *as well as to the Aryan society of India,* has been evolved in the struggle between the originally matriarchal and the immigrated patriarchal system of society as a

[82] *Ib.* 121.
[83] *Ib.* 125.
[84] *Ib.* 128.
[85] TCCPI ii. 369.
[86] MRI 128.

means to subdue the former by the religiously organised rule of the latter.[87]

We have emphasized parts of the quotation only to point out where the argument of Ehrenfels is doubtful. According to him, during the Vedic period, the Vedic Aryans, in spite of being patriarchal, were not having such extreme practices as the *sati* to humiliate the women. He has accepted the 'probability of a better position of women, the existence of adult-marriage and permission of widow-remarriage among the Aryans in the period of the Early Vedas.'[88] Consequently he argued:

> The Brahmin hostility against womanhood, opposing the principles of the Early Vedas, where women enjoyed an honoured position, is thus easily explainable as the outcome of the struggle between the patriarchally organised nomadic herdsmen, whose sociology is the basis of the Aryan Brahmanism against the matriarchally organised indigenous civilization, which resisted more actively than was usually the case in similar constellations of other countries. The Brahmin desire to break this resistance with all possible means easily explains the progressive decline of the standard of womanhood in India, proportional to the more and more draconic means applied by the representatives of the patriarchal society.[89]

But the position of women during the early Vedic period was really not as honourable as our author seems to believe. There are distinct references in the *Samhitas* to the practice of burning the widow along with the dead-body of her husband.

> The funeral hymns of the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* show that in the Vedic period, like *Purusamedha, anumarana* or following the husband to death by mounting his funeral pyre, was also practised in a symbolic fashion.[90]

The *Maitrayani Samhita*[91] described women as untruth, the *Taittiriya Samhita*[92] said that a good woman was worse than a bad man and the *Katha Samhita*[93] sarcastically alluded to the woman's ability to obtain things from her husband by cajolery at night. The point is that the pastoral economy of the Vedic peoples was at the root of their patriarchal organisation which could not have much scope to make the position of the women honourable. The degradation of women in the Vedic society was conditioned by the economic life of the Vedic peoples just as the tenacity of the matriarchal elements in the lives of the non-Vedic peoples of the country—the peasant masses—can be

87 *Ib.* 129. Italics added.
88 *Ib.* 126.
89 *Ib.* 127.
90 MASI xli. 19.
91 i. x. 6. 8; ii. 6. 3.
92 vi. 5.8.2.
93 xxxi. i.

accounted for only from the basic pattern of their economic life.

It is this economic basis of both father-right and mother-right which Ehrenfels, in spite of rightly associating agriculture with matriarchy, has, on the whole, overlooked. This has led him to treat both patriarchy and matriarchy as 'things-in-themselves,' the former waging a kind of battle as it were against the latter.

It is true that the most extravagant methods were necessary in this country to establish the victory of patriarchy. Further, Ehrenfels is the only writer to have insisted that such exaggerated efforts to establish artificially the superiority of the male resulted in the institutions of hypergamy, child-marriage and the *sati*. The special vigour to overthrow matriarchy must have necessarily implied, as Ehrenfels rightly claimed, a corresponding special vigour which mother-right must have been enjoying in this country. But our analysis cannot stop here. For the tenacity of mother-right among the Indian masses is itself a problem and the problem is not solved by saying, as Ehrenfels did, that mother-right was extremely ancient.[94]

On the other hand, when we look at the problem from the point of view of the economic basis of the social institutions, the answer appears to be rather simple. As we have discussed the point in the last chapter, the economic development of the country, generally speaking, remained stunted. The large masses of the Indian people continued to be merely the tillers of the soil. If the undeveloped agricultural economy had a natural tendency to create matriarchal society and if by far the largest proportion of the Indian masses remained predominantly agricultural, then it was but logical that the most extravagant methods would have been necessary to coerce upon them the supremacy of the male. Ehrenfels rightly indicated the resistance to father-right, but he has not explained the right reason for it.

This neglect of the economic basis of mother-right has resulted in a more serious limitation in Ehrenfels' observations. The violent imposition of male supremacy might have resulted in such artificial institutions as hypergamy, child-marriage and the *sati*. But even then the matriarchal culture-elements could not be stamped out from the lives of the masses. Ehrenfels has himself prepared the most admirable catalogue of these exten-

[94] MRI 121-2.

sive and deep-rooted survivals of mother-right in India. In view of the extreme measures taken to suppress it, the survivals of mother-right are, to say the least, peculiar. Ehrenfels himself has given us no reasonable explanation of this peculiarity. When we ask ourselves what could have been the real reason for these extensive survivals of mother-right in India—there can possibly be only one answer. Elements of the material basis of mother-right must have survived. We return to the same point: the overwhelmingly large majority of the people remained at a comparatively low level of agricultural economy.

9. Female Principle

Of all the survivals of mother-right, we are at present directly interested in what is usually described as the 'female principle' in the religious beliefs and philosophical views. That this 'female principle,' generally speaking, is the ideological aspect of mother-right will not be doubted by serious scholars. We quote Starbuck[95]:

> Female deities have often enjoyed the highest place among the gods. This depends upon the nature of the social organisation and the respect in which women are held. Clan-life in which the mother is the head of the group is likely to lift the 'mother-goddess' into a supreme position provided the nation has risen above the stage of magic.

This is clearly logical. But we have to pursue further. We have to raise the question concerning the condition 'in which the mother is the head of the group.' When we do so, we come across the fact that in the ultimate analysis the early agricultural economy is the material basis of the female principle.

Unfortunately Starbuck himself has not raised the question, though it is interesting to note that coerced, as it were, by objective historical facts, he was obliged to acknowledge the basic connection between the agricultural pursuit and the female principle.

> It seems inevitable that, as the quieter agricultural pursuits in naturally protected valleys favourable to the worship of goddesses have fallen into the background, through the fusion of clans and cities into warring nations in which chivalry and virility are at a premium, male deities have risen supreme, while those of the 'weaker sex' have been degraded to lesser functions, attached as consorts, superseded and forgotten or, to save themselves, have changed their sex to fit the new demands.[96]

[95] ERE v. 828. [96] *Ib.*

So gods and goddesses are viewed as products of war and peace—the deities of 'stronger sex' during war while those of the 'weaker sex' during peace. The problem was to adjust life as the situation demanded.

> Among the needs are protection and safety. Gods have been especially useful in this relation. Another need is the increase of crops, herds, and children. Goddesses have been the natural and convenient symbols of fertility and increase.[97]

With this as his starting point the author has tried to explain the religious history of India.

> India is unique in having the opposite history—of higher appreciation of goddesses, along with its later development. It illustrates, however, the same principle in a negative way. The *Vedas* were written before and during the period when the Aryans were conquering the aborigines of India and were engaged in feuds among their own tribes. Under such conditions there are no goddesses, although the literature is richly polytheistic. Since the nation has settled down into a relatively peaceful life of agricultural pursuits, the worship of female deities has risen to a place of supreme importance: Durga, spirit of nature and spring; Kali, soul of infinity and eternity; Sarasvati, supreme wisdom; and Sakti, mother of all phenomena.[98]

The relationship conceived between the female principle and the agricultural pursuits is of course important; but it has been conceived within the framework of a hypothesis historically unsound. There were female deities like Candi, whose exploits, as narrated by the *Markandeya Purana,* places her on the same footing as any other male deity renowned for aggressiveness and war-like character. As a matter of fact, the myth of the 'weaker sex' is itself a late product of the patriarchal society and as such any hypothesis built on it has not the prospect of fitting in with facts.

The story of the Amazons of ancient Asia Minor had been largely mythological; but it could as well have had some historical basis. In any case, women, in many primitive races, far from representing the constitutionally weaker sex, are physically more developed than the men and commonly take part in war in primitive societies; they are even generally distinguished by greater cruelty. Briffault,[99] arguing on the basis of a huge mass of evidences, has proved these points conclusively.

It is, therefore, wrong to imagine that men distinguished themselves as warriors because of any constitutional vigour

[97] *Ib.* v. 830.
[98] *Ib.* v. 828.
[99] M i. 443-6, 451-3, 454-8.

inherent in them. The real reason, as Briffault rightly insisted, is to be found in the economic factors:

> The differentiation of the man as warrior and fighter is certainly not due to any constitutional indisposition or incapacity in primitive woman, but to economic necessities.[100]

What were these economic necessities that prevented women from devoting themselves fully to war purposes?

> But while the women are frequently known to share in the active pursuits of men, the constructive occupations which have given rise to the development of material culture belong, in the rudest societies, almost exclusively to the sphere of women's work, and the men take no share in them. All industries were at first home industries, and developed therefore in the hands of the women, who are the home-makers and stayed at home. . . .[101]

The basic discovery which enabled human beings to develop all these industries was agriculture. Therefore, it will be logical to concentrate specially on this.

We may now return to consider the view of Starbuck concerning the female principle in general and the development of Indian religion in particular. It is indeed a remarkable fact that the Vedic pantheon is predominantly male. But the reason is not, as Starbuck thought, that the Vedic peoples were engaged in war. More remarkable, however, is the fact that in the post-Vedic Hinduism, with all its formal allegiance to the *Vedas*, there survived none of the major Vedic gods—Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Prajapati, Pusan, Matarisvan, etc. Yet this exit of the Vedic gods from the post-Vedic pantheon was only logical; the pastoral economy which generated the Vedic pantheon was no longer there in the post-Vedic period to nourish it. The Vedic gods had to wither away. Father-right elements might have been aggressively imposed on the lives of the people, yet the remnants of mother-right could not be completely stamped out. The Indian masses, remaining as they did the tillers of the soil, were sticking to their old Mother Goddess, or Sakti. Not that there is no male god in the later Indian pantheon. But they are, particularly in the predominantly agricultural areas, generally pushed to the background or somehow or other fused with the female. The *siva-lingam*[103] is probably the commonest example of the latter.

[100] *Ib.* i. 451. [101] *Ib.* i. 460.

[102] It may be remembered that the Gauri-*pattam* of the familiar Siva-*lingam* is but the female organ.

Secondly, Starbuck has worked on the hypothesis that the Aryans, after conquering the aborigines of India, settled down in this country to peaceful agricultural pursuits. In the absence in his time of the archaeological data made available in later times, such a hypothesis found almost a universal favour with the nineteenth-century scholars. But the Indus excavations have refuted it. As Marshall summed up his observations on the Indus excavations:

> Five thousand years ago, before ever the Aryans were heard of, the Punjab and Sind, if not other parts of India, as well, were enjoying an *advanced* and *singularly uniform* civilization of their own, closely akin, but in some respects even superior to that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt.[103]

And again,

> 'One thing that stands out clear and unmistakable, both at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, is that civilization . . . at these two places is not an incipient civilization, but one already age-old and stereotyped on Indian soil with many millennia of human endeavour behind it. Thus India must henceforth be recognised, along with Persia, Mesopotamia and Egypt as one of the most important areas where the civilizing processes of society were initiated and developed.[104]

But initiated by whom? By the male or by the female. Presumably by the latter. For, like the other centres of ancient civilizations, the Indus too was drawing its wealth from the soil. Agricultural surplus, in other words, was its material basis. And agriculture was the invention of the women.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the relics of the ancient Indus civilization should reveal very strong survivals of matriarchal elements. We may quote Ehrenfels[105] again:

> These excavations, and Sir John Marshall's summary of their archaeological results, have changed the outlook on the history especially of the more highly developed strata within the matriarchal culture-circle of India, and brought about two fundamentally important facts: (a) The predominance of the *pre-Aryan* element in the cultural structure of what we call 'Hinduism,' and (b) the *matriarchal* character of this advanced pre-Aryan civilization to which present-day and medieval India owes so many elements, impulses and cultural moulds.

Those Indus relics with matriarchal character, according to Marshall, were of the nature of religious objects. We shall quote his observations on these later. For the present, we merely want to establish that the importance of the female

103 MIC i. preface v. 104 *Ib.*
105 MRI 1.

principle in the religious history of India was not the product of the peaceful conditions of the post-Vedic period, as Starbuck imagined it to have been. Its history, rather, is to be traced as far back as the earliest recorded period of the discovery of agriculture in this country, just as the strength of its survival in the later periods can only be accounted for by the fact that the people among whom it survived remained predominantly agriculturists.

10. Religion of Mohenjo-daro

There was a controversy among scholars over the importance of the non-Aryan elements in later Indian religion, broadly called Hinduism. Monier-Williams and Hopkins thought that the contribution was almost negligible and it consisted of the most barbaric and degrading aspects. Oppert, on the other hand, argued an opposite view. In the background of this controversy, as Marshall[106] rightly observed, the new materials from Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were invested with surprising value because these were actual monuments of the pre-Aryan period.

Marshall's own interpretations of these new materials have largely been inspired by the observations of Chanda on Saktism, published a few years before the actual Indus excavations started:

> For a conception of the god-head analogous to that of the Sakta conception of the Devi we should travel beyond countries dominated by the Vedic Aryans and the Avestic Iranians to Asia Minor. Syria, Egypt and other countries bordering on the Mediterranean.[107]

The reason is not really far to seek:

> There is a strong resemblance between the Indian Sakta conception of Sakti and the Sakta ritual of the followers of *Vamacara* and *Kulacara*, who practised ceremonial promiscuity, on the one hand, and the Semitic conception of Astart (Astarte), the Egyptian conception of Isis, and the Phrygian conception of Cybele on the other.

On the basis of these similarities, Chanda observed:

> *It may be assumed that Saktism arose in India under the same social conditions as those under which Astarte was conceived in Syria, Cybele in Asia Minor, and Isis in Egypt.*[108]

[106] MIC i. 49.
[107] IAR 148-9.
[108] *Ib.* 150. Italics added.

What exactly was the nature of these social conditions? Chanda answered the question in one word. It was matriarchy. Matriarchal conditions were actually prevailing in ancient Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt.

> There is a large body of evidence to show that the Semites before their separation passed through a matriarchal stage of society. The tribe was a group of people inhabiting a particular oasis in the Arabian desert. It was made up of mothers and their brothers and children. The fathers were men of other tribes, dwelling in other oasis, who contracted only temporary unions with the mothers. Descent was traced through the mother, and she was the head of the clan in peace and war. In such a society the chief deity of the tribe must have been conceived as a counterpart of the human matriarch. Male divinities might exist and be known as 'maternal uncle,' but they would not be called 'father,' and would play so unimportant a part that they would survive only sporadically in later religion. This view is confirmed by the fact that all those traits which are oldest and most permanent in the character of Ashtart-Ishtar are those which for other reasons we must predicate of the ancient Semitic tribal mother.[109]

Similarly, the origin of the Great Mother Cybele is to be understood in the light of the fact, observed by Frazer,[110] that mother-right 'lingered in Lycia down to historical period; and we may conjecture that in former times it was widely spread throughout Asia Minor.'

Again, in the home of Isis (Egypt), the archaic system of mother-kin, with its preference for women over men in matters of property and inheritance, lasted down to Roman times.'[111]

On the basis of these similarities, Chanda[112] concluded:

> The Sakta conception of the Devi, as Adya Sakti, 'the primordial energy,' and Jagadamba, 'the mother of universe,' also very probably arose in a society where matriarchate or mother-kin was prevalent.

There is no doubt that of all the comments so far made on the origin of Saktism, this is the most rational. Unfortunately, however, the author did not pursue this question of the social origin of Saktism any further. Instead he wanted to look at Saktism with its matriarchal basis as a mere matter of racial characteristic. The question he finally considered worth asking was: Did Saktism then originate among the Indo-Aryans of the Outer countries?[113] But the question has lost much of its value to the scholars of later times.

[109] ERE ii. 115. [110] AAO 394-5.
[111] *Ib.* 395. [112] IAR 153. [113] *Ib.* 153.

The problem of Saktism and its possible relation to mother-right, however, had to be reopened by Marshall; because, among the material remains of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were found a large number of female figurines of terra-cotta and such other objects that could not easily pass for toys:

> Now it is well known that female statuettes akin to those from the Indus Valley and Baluchistan have been found in large numbers and over a wide range of countries between Persia and the Aegean, notably in Elam, Mesopotamia, Transcaspia, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, Cyprus, Crete, the Cyclades, the Balkans and Egypt.[114]

The similarities are striking. Marshall tried to interpret the Indus relics in the light of what is already known about similar figurines found in other places:

> The generally accepted view concerning them is that they represent the Great Mother or Nature Goddess, whose cult is believed to have originated in Anatolia (probably in Phrygia) and spread thence throughout most of Western Asia. The correspondence, however, between these figurines and those found on the banks of the Indus is such that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the latter also represented Mother or Nature Goddess and served the same purpose as their counterparts in the West, viz. either as votive offerings or, less probably, as cult images for household shrines; and this conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the range of these figurines now extends practically without a break from the Indus to the Nile, over tracts that are not only geographically continuous but which in the Chalcolithic Age were united by common bonds of culture.[115]

Marshall made the further important comment:

> That, like the Mother Goddesses of Western Asia, they originated in a matriarchal state of society, is a highly reasonable supposition.[116]

And again,

> this remarkable parallelism between these cults and Indian Saktism has long been recognised and commented on, and it has been assumed that in both cases it originated in the similar (i.e. matriarchal) conditions of society which are thought to have prevailed during the pre-Aryan age in India as well as in the Nearer East. What was not recognised and what has only been revealed by the discoveries at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, is that in the Chalcolithic Age India and Western Asia were closely united by common bonds of civilization.... As a fact, there is some evidence...of a tangible concrete connection between the religions of Indus Valley and those of Mesopotamia[117]

114 MIC i. 50.
115 *Ib.*
116 *Ib.* i. 51.
117 *Ib.* i. 58.

Such a *tangible concrete connection* must have been a remarkable revelation of the Indus archaeology. But our explanation of the female figurines cannot end there. If these were the images of the mother-goddess and if such images are 'turned up in hundreds among the Neolithic and Chalcolithic deposits of Central Europe, the Mediterranean region and the Near East,[118]' these must have evolved everywhere from the same material origin. This origin can be understood only in the background of the primitive agricultural matriarchate, a question which Marshall has not raised seriously enough. When we do so, we come across the same point everywhere: all these ancient civilizations drew their wealth from the soil, and agriculture was the invention of women. Beneath all these centres of ancient civilizations, therefore, remain buried the images of the mother-goddess, because these were supposed to ensure, though magically, the success of the agricultural operation to those women who, by inventing agriculture, 'played the most decisive part in the origin of civilization.'

11. The Gramadevatas

In India, however, the story of the mother-goddesses did not end with the Indus civilization. We may quote Marshall again:

> She is the 'Mother' or 'Great Mother' and prototype of the power (*prakriti*) which developed into that of Sakti. Her representatives are the Gramadevatas, the village-goddesses whose names are legion and whose local attributes may vary, but who one and all are personifications of the same power.... Who is the author of fertility....There can be no question that they held a pre-eminent position among the national deities of the non-Aryan population. This is indicated alike by the popularity of their cults among the primitive tribes, and by the fact that the leading part in their ritual and ceremonies are taken, not by Brahmanas, but by low-caste Pariahs—members of some of the old tribes who are supposed to know how to win the ear of the goddess. Some of the pre-Aryan tribes have never really come within the fold of Hinduism, and among these tribes the worship of the Mother or Earth Goddess is specially strong.[119]

Ehrenfels[120] has prepared the following list of those backward peoples of India in the consciousness of whom the primitive goddess is still occupying a supremely important position: Bili Magga, Budubudiki, Darzi, Domb, Gadaba,

[118] Thomson SAGS i. 237-48.
[119] MIC i. 51.
[120] MRI 79-80.

Gangadikara Okkalu, Ganga, Golla, Haddi, Hallikar Okkaliga, Helava, Holeya, Idiga, etc. The list is imposing.

If, as Marshall has argued, these Gramadevatas be really the representatives of the 'Mother' or 'Great Mother', the relics of whom are traceable as far back as at least 3000 B.C., then we have here, again, another example of uneven development which we have tried to argue elaborately in the previous chapter. There are people still surviving in India that live the life of—and therefore also stick to the beliefs and ideas of—the ancestors of those that built the Indus civilization many thousands years ago.

More significant is the fact that among the vast masses of the Indian peasantry—that is, among those that are no longer living in the tribal society—male deities have only secondary position. The deities that have any real grip on the lives of the masses are mostly females. The better known names of these are Durga, Kali, Candi and others. But, as it has been argued, the variations in these names, like the variations in the qualities and histories attributed to them, being later additions, are only secondary in importance.[121] Behind them all is the primeval goddess, terra-cotta representations of whom are unearthed at all the centres of ancient civilizations. The survival of this primeval mother in the consciousness of the Indian masses can only be explained by the survival of its material basis. This illustrates the second point concerning the peculiarity of India's social history which we have tried to argue in the previous chapter. Survival of the tribal past has indeed been an important characteristic of the traditional Indian society.

121 JASB (N.S.) xxi. 315 ff.

BOOK III

Materialism

Chapter Five

TANTRA

OBSCURE CULTS AND AGRICULTURAL RITUAL

There are two basic trends in Indian culture, the Vedic and the non-Vedic. A predominant, if not the most conspicuous feature of the latter is Tantrism, with its supreme emphasis on *prakriti* or the female principle. In this chapter we are going to enquire how far our general argument concerning the agricultural origin of the female principle may explain the other fundamental characteristics of the Tantrika beliefs and practices.

1. Magic and Early Agriculture

It is a fact observed all over the world that in the comparatively earlier phases, agricultural operations are viewed as vitally dependent on magical observances. Magical beliefs thus acquired a strange importance at the early agricultural stage.

> The art of cultivation is regarded by all uncivilized peoples as depending in an ever higher degree than other operations, upon magical power and procedures rather than on skill and manual labour.[1]

Briffault[2] has illustrated this with many examples. The Peublo Indians were shocked at the European settlers planting the corn without any ritual; and yet to their utter amazement they saw abundant crops resulting from it. 'The fact did more to shatter their faith than all the missionary crusades of the Padres.' In Northern Borneo, 'the whole labour of farming is for the Dyaks no more prosaic routine, but a supernaturally protected process with constant festal interruptions.' Similarly, in South Africa, 'the Sumba woman will not hoe their lands if their

[1] Briffault M. iii. 2-3. [2] *Ib.* iii. 3.

dance has not been held, as they say that if they do not respect their spirits there will be no crop.' In ancient Mexico, again, every agricultural operations, however trivial, was accompanied with ceremonies and incantations to the goddess of fertility.

To this we may add a few more examples from the Indian tribes.

The Hos[3] observe seven important festivals. All these are associated with their agricultural life, and as such the time and season for these are determined by the needs of agriculture. These festivals are not pure fun; their purpose is to ensure, though magically, the success of agriculture.

The Santals,[4] in the month of *Sawan* (July-August), when the monsoon rains make the transplantation of the paddy seedlings possible, observe the Hariar Sim festival so that 'the paddy may grow green.'

> In the Central Provinces bunches of wild rice are hung up in the house in August, when the crop is growing, to represent the mother rice-plant. Kurmis in the same province observe the Hereli or 'feast of greenery' in the middle of *Sawan* (July-August) when the rice is sprouting. Balls of flour mixed with salt are given to the cattle. The plough and other implements are taken to a tank, washed, and set up in the courtyard of the house. The plough is placed facing the sun, and butter and sugar are offered to it.... Bhuiyas, Kols and Binds in the United Provinces also worship during the rainy season Hariyari Devi, Mother of Greenery, by employing their Baiga Priest to sacrifice chickens and to pour a libation of wine on the fields after harvest or before the sowing season.[5]

These are only a few examples. It will not be an exaggeration to suggest that the backward peoples of India knew of no agricultural operation which is not viewed as vitally dependent upon some magical act.[6]

What is sometimes overlooked, however, is the circumstance that our remote ancestors, like our tribal neighbours, were viewing agricultural success as similarly dependent upon magical spells and procedures.

Kautilya[7] in his *Arthasastra* instructed that there should not be any sowing without the appropriate magical incantation or *mantra*:

[3] Majumdar AT 211-2.
[4] JASB (Sc) xix. 7. [5] Crooke RFNI 265.
[6] We shall see many examples of this ritual in the course of the present Chapter.
[7] Chanda IAR 133.

Always, while sowing seeds, a handful of seeds bathed in water with a piece of gold shall be sown first and the following *mantra* recited: 'Salutation to god Prajapati Kasyapa, agriculture may always flourish and the goddess (may reside) in seeds and wealth, *Candavata ho.*

When we go back beyond Kautilya, even as far as the Vedic literatures, we come across the same point. Of course, agriculture had only a secondary status in the Vedic economy. Yet it is of interest to note that in the comparatively few references to agriculture that we have in the Vedic literatures, the process is viewed as vitally dependent upon magical spells and performances. The *Atharva Veda*[8] recommended the following *mantra* while sowing the seeds:

Raise thyself up, grow thick by thy own might, O Grain! Burst every vessel! The lightning in the heaven shall not destroy thee!

When we invoke thee, god grain, and thou dost listen, then do thou raise thyself up like the sky, be inexhaustible as the sea!

Inexhaustible shall be those that attend to thee, inexhaustible thy heaps! They who give thee as a present shall be inexhaustible, they who eat thee shall be inexhaustible!

The *Taittiriya Samhita*[9] mentions a similar *mantra*:

The furrow anointed with ghee, with honey, approved by the all-gods, the Maruts, full of strength, swelling with milk, do thou, O furrow, turn towards us with milk.

Even in the *Rig Veda*[10] we have examples of chants designed to ensure success in agriculture.

However, it is in the comparatively later portions of the Vedic literatures, particularly in the *Grihya Sutras,* that the dependence of agriculture on magic is clearer and more direct. The *Asvalayana Grihya Sutra,*[11] the *Sankhayana Grihya Sutra*[12] and the *Bharadvaja Grihya Sutra*[13] prescribed that offerings to the deity of the field should be performed before ploughing it. The *Paraskara Grihya Sutra*[14] gave Sita, the goddess furrow, considerable importance and the *Gobhila Grihya Sutra*[15] prescribed that she, along with such female deities as Asa, Arada and Anagha were to be invoked at the rituals concerning the furrowing, thrashing, sowing, reaping and putting the corn into the barn.[16]

[8] SBE xlii. 141.
[9] Keith VBYS 316.
[10] iv. 57. 6.
[11] ii. 10. 4.
[12] iv. 13. 5.
[13] ii. 10.
[14] ii. 17. 9.
[15] iv. 4. 27.
[16] The other female deities connected with Vedic agriculture are mentioned in the previous chapter.

The Vedic evidences mentioned are particularly significant. Agriculture might have been comparatively less important to the Vedic people; but magical rites was considered vitally important for agriculture even by them.

The question is why was it thus considered? Thomson[17] analysed the reasons for this by contrasting agriculture with the occupation of cattle-raising:

> So long as they have pasture, cattle feed and breed of themselves, but by comparison with cattle-raising the work of tilling, sowing and reaping is slow, arduous and uncertain. It requires patience, foresight, faith. Accordingly, agricultural society is characterised by the extensive development of magic.

To the early agriculturists, it was not known why or how the plants really grew. The process from sowing to reaping was with them greatly mysterious. Besides, the technique was poor and consequently the prospect of success extremely precarious. That is why it required patience, foresight and faith.

But how could magic provide them with all these psychological necessities? Magic rests on the principle that by creating the illusion that we control reality, we can actually control it. But how could this illusion be created? By enacting it in fantasy. That could not obviously have any effect on the actual course of nature. But it could and did have an appreciable effect on the performers themselves. Inspired by the belief that the fulfilment of the desired reality is ensured by enacting it in fantasy, they were able to work harder for the purpose of actually fulfilling it.

Magic rests on ignorance. But it would be wrong to view it as mere ignorance. For it is also a guide to action, though a psychological one. At the initial stage of agriculture, at which this psychological guide is most needed, we naturally find a peculiar intensification of magical beliefs and practices.

2. Meaning of Vamacara

If agriculture was the invention of women, then it is only logical that agricultural magic in its origin should belong exclusively to the province of women. Here we have an important clue to Tantrism. For, contrary to our usual notion, Tantrism, too, originally consisted of ritual practices in which only

[17] AA 21-2.

the women participated. The reason is that Tantrism had its sources in the agricultural ritual.

Let us begin from the general position that women alone were originally concerned with agricultural magic. Briffault[18] summed up the point thus:

> The magical or religious rites intended to secure the fertility of the fields were naturally within the special competence of the women who cultivated them....

He has argued this on the basis of an overwhelming mass of material. We may mention a few examples:

The Raruba women's society in Sierra Leone 'has for its chief function to prepare "medicine" or magical charm, which is sprinkled over the rice-fields, thus insuring their fertility.'[19] The corn-dance of the Cheyennes was, they say,

> practised by young girls and middle-aged women, who danced in a circle.... The woman who led the dance carried the sacred ear of corn on a stick which was fitted into a hole in the butt of the ear. Among the Sioux the women performed each spring with considerable ceremonial the magical rites which ensured the fertility of the fields.[20]
>
> Among the Hidatsas, the women, at the corn festival, carried at the end of sticks samples of all the vegetables which they cultivated, maize, pumpkin, melons, etc. They proceeded with them to the lodge. Here they stripped naked, and the elder men sprinkled both the fruits and the women with consecrated water. The men, in this instance, performed the fertilising function; but the festival was, we are told, 'instituted by the women.'[21]

We may look at the evidences from another point of view. The primary pre-requisite for successful agriculture is rain.

> No rites connected with the success of agricultural operations are of such paramount importance as those designed to control the rainfall. Those rites are commonly regarded as appertaining to the women's special sphere.[22]

Following are some examples. Among the tribes of Peru and the Araucanians of Chile, the rain-making magic depends entirely upon sacred women or priestesses.

> Among the Abipones of the Gran Chaco no one but the eldest woman of the tribe was regarded as qualified to provide the water required in the village. Among the Guanches of the Canary Islands the production of rain was the business of priestesses; they proceeded for that purpose to the sea-shore and beat the water with rods. Throughout India the magical operations intended to secure a supply of rain are performed almost exclusively by the women.[23]

18 M iii. 3.
19 *Ib*.
20 *Ib*.
21 *Ib*. iii. 4.
22 *Ib*. iii. 10.
23 *Ib*.

> Abundant traces of the rain-making functions of the priestesses of primitive Europe survive in the attributes and activities of their successors, the witches of medieval and modern times.[24]

Similarly in Africa, where rain-making is a very prominent function of the sacred king, 'the association of that function with the special powers and activities of women is nevertheless apparent.'[25] We shall presently see certain interesting details of this rain-making magic. For the present it is sufficient for our purpose to remember that, as a vital aspect of agricultural operation, it originally belonged to the province of women.

The sources of certain cults of the ancient period are clearly traced to agricultural magic. We may mention one of these.

It is the cult of Dionysos, represented as 'inventing and introducing agriculture.'[26] In Boeotia the rites associated with Dionysos 'were the immemorial rites indispensable to the successful cultivation of the soil.'[27] And the rites were celebrated by women.

> No man was permitted, even as late as the time of Pausanias, to enter the chapel which represented the birth-chamber of Dionysos at Thebes.[28]

The story of Pentheus shows that men trying to spy upon such women's mysteries were originally exposed to the danger of being torn to pieces.[29]

> It would, in fact, appear that the whole cult associated with Dionysos was originally a women's religion, from the rites of which men were excluded. When Dionysian religion was introduced into Italy no men were, under the severest penalties, allowed to be present at the celebrations.[30]

The idea of rituals resting exclusively or mainly on women may appear to us to be strange. The reason, however, is our essentially patriarchal preoccupations.

> At the present day in Christian and other pronouncedly patriarchal societies, such as those of Brahmanical India and of China, the notion of priestly functions being exercised by women runs counter to all conceptions of beseemingness and fitness.[31]

But it was not so in the ancient days, particularly among those people who were moving forward to civilization on the basis of the discovery of agriculture. 'The ancient world was full of

24 *Ib.* iii. 11.
25 *Ib.* iii. 13.
26 *Ib.* iii. 123.
27 *Ib.*
28 *Ib.* iii. 125-6.
29 Thomson AA 139-40.
30 Briffault M iii. 128.
31 *Ib.* ii. 514.

priestesses.'[32] There were, for example, the Vestals of the most ancient and sacred institutions of the Roman cult.

There is every indication that both they and other priestesses, the Regina sacrorum, the Flaminicae, played in earlier times an even more important part in Italian cult. Besides the official priestesses, ancient Italy swarmed with priestly and prophetic women who exercised often an even greater influence than the official priestesses of the temples.[33]

Similarly there were priestesses in ancient Greece.

The most sacred and ancient shrines of Greece, such as those of Delphi and of Dodona, were served by priestly and prophetic women. The priestess of Demeter, like the Vestals at Roman spectacles, occupied a special throne of honour at the Olympic games; and at Halicarnassus she was termed also the priestess of Demos, the representative of the people. In the primitive cults of Greece that prominence was very much more pronounced, and there can be little doubt that in those earlier cults, which became later connected with th religion of Dionysos, priestly functions were exercised not only chiefly, but exclusively by women.[34]

The same was true of ancient Babylonia, Assyria, and Egypt.

As in Greece so in Babylonia and Assyria women were inspired prophetesses of the god. It was from the priestesses and serving women of Ishtar of Arbela that Esshar-Haddon received the oracles of the goddess.[35]

Assyrian inscriptions called the priestesses the Mothers. In Carthage, the mediators between the great goddess and the people were women. In ancient Egypt the high-priestess of Raa was the queen herself. There were priestesses in the old Middle and New Kingdom.[36]

Needham[37] has recently shown that in ancient China, particularly among the Taoists, magical functions originally belonged to the women.

The Chinese had a word of their own for shaman, however, namely *wu*.... It seems that there were two kinds of *wu*, the *wu* proper, who were women, and the *hsi*, who were men.

In the primitive cultures, Briffault has added, 'the part played by women in religious cult is found to be even more pronounced.' He has adduced a vast number of instances in support of this. And he concluded:

Thus among our own ancestors in Western and Northern Europe, as among many uncultured races which we have already noticed in other parts of the world, it would appear that formerly religious

[32] *Ib.*
[33] *Ib.*
[34] *Ib.* ii. 515.
[35] *Ib.*
[36] *Ib.*
[37] SCC ii. 134.

and priestly functions, far from appertaining prescriptively to the sphere of masculine occupations, belonged, on the contrary, to that of the women, and that those functions have only been transferred subsequently to male priests.[38]

As an example of such transference, the case of the Druids may be cited.

> There is evidence that they (the Druids) had ousted women as the earlier magic-wielding persons. The rites of agriculture and the possession of much primitive lore having been first of all in the hands of women, and the rites being largely magical, they were 'par excellence,' magicians. With the gradual encroachment of man on woman's domain, with the growing supremacy of gods over goddesses, men became also great magicians.[39]

But the point is that the encroachment of man on woman's domain, from the point of view of magical functions, could be neither abrupt nor without any trace of the former state of affairs. That is, even after the magico-religious functions were adjusted to the patriarchal conditions, traces of these being formerly the exclusive functions of women, persisted. The male, in order to adapt himself to the priestly functions, had to surrender his sex, as it were, and to fuse himself with the female. The priests of Ishtar, of the Syrian goddess, the Galli and Kouretes, the priests of Pessinos, the Hittite priests, those of Ephesian Artemis and others had physically to emasculate themselves in order to be able to assume the priestly functions.[40]

> The priests of Cybele in historic times were eunuchs called Galloi, who first appear in Alexandrian literature about the 3rd Century B.C. Clad in female garb, they wore their hair long and fragrant with ointment, and celebrated rites to the accompaniment of flutes, cymbals, tambourines, and castanets, yelling and dancing themselves into a frenzy until their excitement culminated in self-scourging, self-laceration, and exhaustion.[41]

However, the commonest way of surrendering the male sex had been the use of the female dress on the part of the priests. The significance of this practice is to be understood in the context of the fact that, according to the primitive belief, clothes are parts of its wearer's person.[42]

> It is a universal principle in primitive society that the distinctive dress of each sex implies that the person wearing it is engaged in those occupations which are peculiar to that sex.[43]

[38] M ii. 543.
[39] Quoted *Ib.* ii. 541.
[40] *Ib.* iii. 213.
[41] ERE iv. 377.
[42] Frazer GB 43-4.
[43] Briffault M ii. 532.

In Patagonia men, exercising shamanistic functions, are 'obliged, as it were, to leave their sex and to dress themselves in female apparel.'[44] Among the Dayak tribes of Borneo all men who formerly practised magic were required to put on female dress.[45]

> When Zulu chiefs perform rain-making ceremonies they put on a woman's petticoat. In Madagascar the priests dressed as women. In Tahiti and the Marquesas the priests of the Areois stained their skin a light colour so that it might resemble a woman's, and affected the ways and manners of women.[46]

The rule that the priests should dress like women is found among the North American Indians, the tribes of New Mexico and throughout Indonesia and Pelew Islands.[47] Whitehead[48] has reported that at Guichivada in the Telegu country, the priest, when officiating, has to wear woman's apparel.

The same is true of the ancient days.

> Among the ancient Germans male priests dressed as women. In Babylon the priests of Ishtar wore female attire, and so did those of the Syrian goddess and those of Pessiones.[49]

The Korybantes, the Dactyloi, the Kouretes, the priests of ancient Rome, of Herakles at Kos did likewise.[50]

Briffault has given us many more examples. His conclusion:

> It does not appear that the universal practice is susceptible of any other interpretation than that magical power was originally associated with women, and was regarded as essentially a woman's function.[51]

To sum up. Agriculture was the discovery of women. Agricultural magic, from which the ancient religions originated, belonged exclusively to the province of women. Later, in order to adjust the religions to the patriarchal conditions, these functions began to be transferred to men. Even then, the male as male could not discharge these. They could become priests only by changing their sex to that of females.

We may now turn to Tantrism. How far its characteristic practices and fundamental concepts can be traced back to agricultural magic of the primitive peoples is a point which we shall presently take up. For the moment, we may raise only one point: Is there anything in Tantrism that leads us to infer that it was originally the exclusive affair of women?

44 *Ib.* ii. 525. 45 *Ib.* ii. 526. 46 *Ib.* ii. 531.
47 *Ib.* 48 Quoted *Ib.* iii. 50. 49 *Ib.* ii. 531.
50 *Ib.* 51 *Ib.* ii. 534.

That among the Tantrikas, female shamanesses called *bhairavis* and *yoginis* still occupy an important place will not be doubted. Observed Needham:

> It is interesting that Tantrism, like Taoism, encouraged women adepts, and we find names such as those of Laksminkara (A.D. 729) and Sahajayogini (A.D. 765) in the list of its leaders.[52]

Nevertheless, the Tantrikas, as we find them, are mostly males. But the question is: Do the males *as males* participate in the Tantrika practices? The answer is in the negative. The *Acarabheda Tantra*[53] prescribed:

> Worship the five principles (*panca tattva*), the sky-flower (*kha-puspa*) and the *kula* woman. That will be *vamacara*. The ultimate female force is to be propitiated by becoming a woman (*vama bhutva yajet param*).

The *five principles*, the sky-flower and the *kula* woman are technical terms of Tantra, the meanings of which we shall discuss later. What deserves particularly to be noted here is the instruction to become a woman while propitiating the ultimate female force: *vama bhutva yajet param.* Why should the Tantrikas thus try to become women? There could be only one answer to it. The practices were originally associated with women and were regarded as essentially women's functions. As we have seen, in other cases the same point is borne out by the practice of the priests wearing the female robe.

It is here that we are to seek the real meaning of the word *Vamacara,* with which Tantrism is so intimately associated. Even very competent Sanskritists have often misunderstood the word and rendered it as the *left-hand-path.*[54] That does not make much sense. It is *vama* and *acara. Acara* means practice or, more strictly, ritual practice. *Vama* means woman or the sexual urge (*kama*). *Vamacara* thus stands for the ritual practices of woman and of sex. We have seen that even the Vedic literatures contain many references to ritual practices of sexual nature. However, these were the literatures of the predominantly pastoral and, therefore, highly patriarchal peoples. Thus, such Vedic practices could not leave any exalted place for the woman in these. Tantrism, on the contrary, lays a very great emphasis on the female. It is the propitiation of the female force and it requires that while propitiating one has to become a woman.

[52] SCC ii. 427. [53] *VK*(B) vii. 512.
[54] Monier-Williams SED 941. cf. ERE xii. 196.

Obviously, it is to be traced to those ritual practices which were originally the exclusive affairs of women and, as we shall presently see, sexual matters played a tremendously important part in it. That explains the meaning of *vamacara*.

It will be objected that *vamacara* is only one of many forms of the Tantrika practice. We cannot, in other words, equate Tantrism with it. As a matter of fact, the *vamacara* of Tantrism is sharply contrasted with another mode called *daksinacara*.

But it is in the *vamacara* that we are to seek for the original version of Tantrism. Many reasons may be adduced in support of this. That the *daksinacara* is only a late invention is obvious from its artificial and compromising character. One could be a *daksinacari tantrika* and at the same time a follower of the Vedic path.[55] Secondly, some of the Tantrika texts declare that between the two, *vamacara* represents the more genuine form of Tantrism. As the *Vamakesvara Tantra*[56] said,

> There are two forms of practices (*acara*), differing between themselves as *vama* and *daksina*; one is on the *daksina* side from the moment of birth, while the *vama* path is acquired only after initiation (*abhiseka*).

This is to be understood in the context of the tremendous importance attached to initiation in Tantrism. An uninitiated Tantrika is hardly a Tantrika. And, if the initiation makes him a *vamacari*, the implication is that the real Tantrika is a *vamacari*. Thirdly, as it has been correctly observed, it is not always possible to understand the real nature of Tantrism, relying too exclusively on the extant texts available on it.[57] Much of such texts are spurious. On the other hand, Tantrism proper is largely of the nature of secret practices and the practising Tantrikas would not too readily impart the secret to the uninitiated. Yet a few of our scholars, thanks to their personal contacts with the practising Tantrikas, have been able to elicit some of these secrets. Among them, one has reported that at least the Tantrikas of Bengal would not consider any mode other than *vamacara* to be valid.[58] The point is important. Apart perhaps from the solitary exception of the matriarchal South, Greater Bengal

[55] This has misled even a scholar like Bagchi who thinks that Tantrism had two forms, the orthodox and the heterodox. ST i. 45.
[56] *VK*(B) vii. 513.
[57] Bandopadhyaya *R* (B) ii. 274.
[58] *VK*(B) vii. 513.

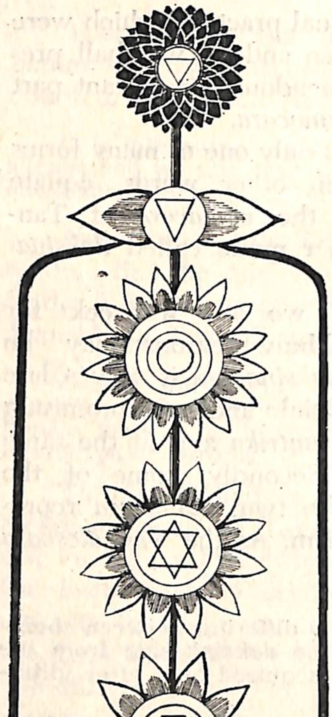


FIG. 1
Sat-Cakra: *The Seven Lotuses.*

happened to be the strongest seat of Tantrism.

Lastly, the most important point is that the *yogasadhana* of Trantrism, i.e. its psycho-physical practices, when properly understood, is found to be nothing but a desperate effort to realise the womanhood in oneself. It is, in other words, a kind of training prescribed to transform the basic personality and consciousness into that of the female. This point has so far been missed by our scholars. The modern writers on Tantrism, usually interested in discovering some hidden spiritual significance in its *yogasadhana,* have unfortunately overlooked the obvious and direct implication of these practices. We shall discuss the question in some detail.

The *yogasadhana* of Tantrism is usually called the *sat-cakra-bheda.*[59] It has for its theoretical basis the anatomical view of the Tantrikas.

According to it, there are two nerve-cords (*nadi,* usually rendered as nerve), running parallel on the two sides of the central cord, called the *susumna,* which stretches, according to the Tantrikas, from near the pelvic curve to the brain; and, therefore, it is often roughly identified with the spinal cord. Within the *susumna* is conceived another nerve-cord, called the *vajrakhya,* within which,

[59] Dutta *BUS* (B) ii. ii. 167 ff.; Dasgupta ORC 107 ff.

again, is conceived another nerve-cord called the *citrini*. In short, this *citrini* is the inmost core of the central nerve cord, the *susumna*.

Seven *padmas,* literally lotuses, are conceived as situated on seven different positions of the *susumna*-cord. Modern writers on Tantrism usually call these the nerve plexuses. But the point is that in Tantrism the lotus (*padma*), like many other terms, is conceived exclusively in a technical sense. In Tantrism the lotus is invariably a symbolic representation of the female genital organ.

Referring to the so-called Buddhist Tantrism, L. de la Vallee Poussion[60] has observed:

> *Vajra* (with the variant *mani*) is a decent or mystic phrase for *linga,* the male organ, just as *padma,* lotus, is the literary rendering of *bhaga* or *yoni.*

Modern Buddhists, often highly puritanical, scarcely suspect the real meaning of the *mantra* or magical spell uttered by them every day: *Om mani padme hum*—'Om, the jewel in the lotus, Amen.' The same symbolic significance was attached to the lotus in ancient Egypt and it persists in the West, 'even when, as also among the Buddhists, they contradict the central doctrine of the religion in which they appear.'[61]

The seven lotuses on the *susumna*-cord are, therefore, nothing but the seven seats of femininity, which is, according to Tantrism, inherent in every human being. This is further confirmed by the following:

According to the *Tantras,* these seven lotuses have definite pictorial representations (FIG. I). Among the various details of these representations, we find the diagram of a triangle within most of the *padmas.* The triangle, again, as we shall presently see, is invariably the Tantrika representation of the female genital organ. Besides, the *Tantras* mention the seven *Saktis,* called Kulakundalini, Varuni, Lakini, etc., each residing in a lotus. Modern scholars have sometimes rendered the word *sakti* as force or energy. Dasgupta[62] has gone so far as to call it an 'electric force.' However, in the specific context of Tantrism, all these would be inadmissible. *Sakti,* in the *Tantras,* essentially means the female. So, if the Kulakundalini and other *Saktis*

[60] ERE xii. 196. [61] ERE v. 829.

[62] Dasgupta ORC 116. Strangely, however, the same author (150) notes that in the so-called Vaisnava Sahajia literatures this *kulakundalini sakti* is conceived as but Radha, i.e., the female principle of the Vaisnavas.

residing in the seven *padmas* of the *susumna* are at all energies or forces, we cannot but conceive them as female forces or feminine energies. Thus, there are seven seats of femininity on the central nerve-cord.

Now we come to the question of the *yogasadhana*. By the control of breath and other means, the Tantra-*sadhaka*, that is, one practising the Tantrika *yoga*, is asked to arouse the Kula-kundalini Sakti (lit., femininity remaining coiled) in the nethermost centre of the *susumna* near the pelvis. The rest of the effort is to transmit this via the *citrini* cord, that is the central core of the *susumna*, upwards, towards the brain, piercing through successive stages, the other lotuses situated on the *susumna*. The highest lotus on the *susumna* is called the *sahasra-dala-padma*, lit., the lotus with a thousand petals, rendered by Seal as the 'thousand-lobed, the upper cerebrum with its lobes and convolutions.'[63] According to the Tantrikas, this is the highest seat of consciousness.

Thus, the essence of the Tantrika *yogasadhana* consists in arousing and vitalising the female principle residing in her nethermost centre and then transmitting her to her highest centre, the seat of consciousness, after piercing all the intermediary positions. It is, thus, nothing but an effort towards a total transformation of the personality into femininity. The Tantrikas naturally conceive that once the Kulakundalini Sakti reaches the *sahasra-dala-padma*, she is united with the masculinity that resides there along with the femininity and everything dissolves into a kind of non-duality, because, evidently, everything is lost into the pure all-absorbing femininity which is aroused within.

It is not the place for us to discuss the merit of the anatomical theory of the Tantrikas. Nor are we interested in assessing the spiritual bliss claimed to result from the *sat-cakra-bheda*. As is well known, much of the speculations on this *yogasadhana* which we find in the written texts of Tantrism, are but later thoughts grafted on its archaic essence. What is here relevant is only that the practice is nothing but a practical method suggested for the purpose of carrying out the injunction: *vama bhutva yajet param*, propitiate the ultimate female principle by becoming a woman.

This interpretation of the *yogasadhana* of Tantrism will

[63] Seal PSAH 221.

appear to be unfamiliar to those accustomed to the standard works on Tantrism by the modern scholars. However, the fact that this is the real interpretation is confirmed by certain other sources, particularly the Carya songs, the essential Tantrika character of which is established by all the scholars who have worked on these, though it is usually thought that this Tantrism is pronouncedly Buddhistic in nature.

Referring to the Buddhistic conception of the 'female force,' Dasgupta[64] observed:

> In the Carya songs we find frequent references to this female force variously called as the Candali, Dombi, Savari, Yogini, Nairamani, Sahajasundari, etc. and we also find frequent mention of the union of the *yogin* with this personified female deity.

It is important to note that this *female force,* thus referred to in various names, according to the standpoint of the Carya songs, does not remain outside the body of the *yogin.* Like the Kulakundalini and other *Saktis,* these female forces are within the body of the *yogin.* As is said in one of these songs,

> The *yogin* Kanha has become a Kapali (i.e. the Tantrika shamaness) and has entered into the practices of *yoga,* and he is sporting in the city of his body in a non-dual form.[65]

In the Carya songs, the rousing of the female principle within the body of the *yogin* is conceived in various ways. In one of the songs it is said, 'One is that lotus, sixty-four are the petals,–the Dombi climbs upon it and dances.'[66] But this dance is compared to the flame that consumes everything in order to leave the pure femininity behind.

> The Candali burns in the navel and she burns the five Tathagatas and the goddesses like Locana and others, and when all is burnt, the moon pours down the syllable *hum.*[67]

Or, as it is put in another song:

> The lotus and the thunder meet together in the middle and through their union Candali is ablaze; that blazing fire is in contact with the house of the Dombi,—I take the moon and pour water. Neither scorching heat nor soak is found, but it enters the sky through the peak of Mount Meru.[68]

The moon pouring down the syllable *hum* or water, will not appear to be meaningless or mysterious if we remember that in primitive thought the moon is conceived as the giver

[64] ORC 116.
[65] Song No. 11. Tr. Dasgupta ORC 105.
[66] Song No. 10. Tr. Dasgupta ORC 116.
[67] ORC 116. [68] *Ib.* 117.

of natural fertility—a point exhaustively discussed by Briffault[69] and Thomson.[70] Nevertheless, there is no doubt that much of the language of the Carya songs is esoteric—*sandhya bhaṣa*, supposed to be understood only by the initiated. However, it is already obvious that from the standpoint of the Carya songs, too, the aim of *yogasadhana* is to rouse the female principle within and to establish her non-duality. In the Carya songs, the point is put in a highly symbolical language and the flavour of Buddhistic metaphysics is added to it. Bereft of all these, however, is the same effort to carry forth in practice the peculiar instruction: *vama bhutva yajet param. Vamacara*, in the sense of being the practice (*acara*) of women (*vama*) is, thus, not a separable attribute of Tantrism characterising only some of its sects; it is rather the inherent feature of Tantrism as such.

Modern scholars on Tantrism have discussed its *yogasadhana* in great details. But this obvious implication of the practices is generally missed. Nevertheless at least some of them have been obliged to admit that somehow or other Tantrism represented the ideal of becoming a woman. Bhandarkar[71] observed:

> The ambition of every pious follower of the system is to become identical with Tripurasundari (a name of the Tantrika female principle), and one of his religious exercises is to habituate himself to think that he is a woman. Thus the followers of the Sakti school justify their appellation by the belief that god is a woman and it ought to be the aim of all to become a woman.

But the question is, why do they believe like this? Bhandarkar has not attempted to answer the question.

Similarly, speaking of the Sahajias (who are Tantrikas), Bose[72] remarked:

> The Sahajias also believe that at a certain stage of spiritual culture the man should transform himself into a woman, and remember that he cannot have experience of true love so long as he cannot realise the nature of a woman in him.

By way of illustrating this, he has quoted some extremely relevant lines and the Sahajia songs:[73]

> Discard the male (*purusa*) in thee and become a woman (*prakriti*); thou wouldst thus be of one body and placed in eternity.
> Love and sex only after (thou become) female (*prakriti*) by nature.
> Thou shouldst, O male, become a woman....

69 M ii. 432, 583-94.
70 SAGS i. 210 ff.
71 VS 146.
72 PCSC 42.
73 *Ib.* cf. Bose *SS* (B) 52.

He who knows the practice of the female and the behaviour of the male....

The question, again, is why do the Sahajias formulate such an apparently peculiar human ideal? Unlike Bhandarkar, Bose tried to face the question boldly and, in fact, to justify the Sahajia stand on psychological grounds:

> But what is meant by a man becoming a woman? Consider the state of an old man of eighty. He is a male being, no doubt, but all his passions have suffered natural extinction and the male elements in him are conspicuous by their absence. This state of things in the grandfather is the effect of age and decay; but consider the case of a young man acquiring that state of neutrality by careful spiritual exercises. In him, his senses will then remain vigorous and sound, entirely free from the decaying influence of old age, but controlled to such an extent that they would produce no reaction due to external stimuli.[74]

The fantastic psychology on which such a statement is based does not deserve to be criticised at length. Besides whatever may be the position the scholar has tried to justify in this manner, it is not that of the Sahajias. The Sahajias do not care to acquire any hypothetical state of neutrality by careful exercises; they have the *positive ideal of becoming a female,*—of rousing the femininity which, according to them, is inherent in all men and, thus to destroy the male in themselves. Besides, the extinction of passions, particularly sexual passion, has never been the aim of any school of genuine Tantrism, least of all the Sahajia Tantrism. Rather, it is to arouse the inner passion in them—the female passion of course—and to work themselves up to a kind of frenzy. As Sastri[75] categorically stated the point, the scriptures of all these Sahajias clearly assert that if you want to attain *bodhi* you must indulge in *kama* or lust in its five forms (*panca kama*).

But, it will be asked, why was so much importance attached to the effort of becoming a woman and also, as we shall see, to matters relating to human reproduction, or more particularly, to the female role in it? Why, in other words, so much emphasis was laid on *vamacara* in the two senses in which we have tried to understand the word? We have so far argued that *vamacara* is an evidence of the fact that Tantrism was originally the practice only of the women. However, this cannot by itself explain the importance attached to the practice.

[74] *Ib.* 42.
[75] *BD* (B) 71.

In order to answer the question just raised, it is necessary to go deeper into the original significance of Tantrism. We are going to argue that there had been very concrete material need which these practices were designed to satisfy. It was the need of the agricultural operation. But it was agriculture in its earlier stage of development, i.e., based on underdeveloped technology. At this stage the real technique had to be supplemented by an illusory one, the art of cultivation was vitally dependent upon magical powers and procedures.

What, then, is the essence of this magical belief, associated with the earlier stages of agriculture? The belief is that the productive activity of nature is related to, and is even vitally dependent on, the human reproductive functions or, more particularly, the reproductive function of the woman. Tantrism had its origin in this archaic belief. The *yogasadhana* of the Tantrikas, the desperate effort to transform oneself into a woman or to arouse the latent femininity in oneself, was thus logically designed to undertake, however fantastically it might have been, the supremely important functions of enforcing the productive activity on nature.

3. Agricultubal Ritual

We shall first discuss the general theoretical position implicit in the agricultural ritual and then return to the specific questions concerning Tantrism.

> When a Catholic priest remonstrated with the Indians of the Orinoco on allowing their women to sow the fields in the blazing sun, with infants at their breasts, the men answered, 'Father, you don't understand these things, and that is why they vex you. You know that women are accustomed to bear children, and that we men are not. When the women sow, the stalk of maize bears two or three ears, the root of the yucca yields two or three basketfuls, and everything multiplies in proportion. Now why is that? Simply because the women know how to bring forth, and how to make the seed which they sow bring forth also. Let them sow, then; we men don't know as much about it as they do.'[76]

This may be taken as a typical example of the belief underlying agricultural magic. The main point is that human fertility, particularly female fertility, and natural fertility belong to the same order of existence. In other words, human reproduction

[76] Frazer GB 28-9.

and agricultural production are linked up. Therefore, by contagion or by imitation the one can influence the other. In Frazer's terminology, the former would be Contagious Magic and the latter Homoeopathic Magic. The primitive peoples, Frazer observed,

> ... confused the process by which human beings reproduce their kind with the process by which plants discharge the same function and fancied that by resorting to the former they were simultaneously forwarding the latter.[77]

One of the instances, mentioned by Frazer is that of the Bagandas of Central Africa:

> A couple who have given proof of extraordinary fertility by becoming the parents of twins are believed by the Baganda to be endowed with a corresponding power of increasing the fruitfulness of the plantain-trees, which furnish them with their staple food. Some little time after the birth of the twins, a ceremony is performed, the object of which clearly is to transmit the reproductive virtue of the parents to the plantains. The mother lies down on her back in thick grass near the house and places a flower of the plantain between her legs; then her husband comes and knocks the flower away with his genital member. Further, the parents go through the country, performing dances in the gardens of favoured friends, apparently for the purpose of causing the plantain-trees to bear fruit more abundantly.[78]

In this instance the reproductive power of the male, too, is seemingly playing some part. However, in the instance of the Orinocos quoted by Frazer, that is specifically denied and the reproductive power is ascribed to the female alone. This represents the more archaic form of the belief. That is, the fertility of the women in particular is linked up with that of the earth. Frazer did not clearly note this point. Being the invention of women, agricultural production was originally looked at as being vitally related to the female reproductive function. Yet some of the facts mentioned by Frazer point to it.

> The magic virtue of a pregnant woman to communicate fertility is known to Bavarian and Austrian peasants, who think that if you give the first fruit of a tree to a woman with child to eat, the tree will bring forth abundantly next year. On the other hand, the Baganda believe that a barren wife infects her husband's garden with her own sterility and prevent the trees from bearing fruit; hence a childless woman is generally divorced.[79]

Frazer summed up the point by saying, 'a fruitful woman makes plants fruitful, a barren woman makes them barren.'[80]

[77] *Ib.* 136.
[78] *Ib.* 137.
[79] *Ib.* 28.
[80] *Ib.* 29.

In order to understand the significance of this point more fully, we shall have to leave Frazer for the moment and follow Briffault, who has discussed it in greater detail.

It is because of the fact that the women were the first agriculturists, not only were they the original wielders of agricultural magic but, further, the essence of this magic consisted in linking up their fertility with that of the earth.[81]

> The fertility of the soil retained its immemorial association with the women who had been the tillers of the earth and were regarded as the depositaries of agricultural magic.[82]
>
> The supernatural source from which magic powers are regarded as being primarily derived is, we shall see, connected in the closest manner with the functions of women; the magic faculties which it imparts to them are, according to the primitive conceptions, as much a part of their natural constitution as are their reproductive functions.[83]
>
> The successful carrying out of the agricultural labours of women is regarded in primitive thought as due to the magical powers with which they are credited, and is thought to be, like their power of child-bearing, inherent in their sex and to appertain to the very nature of womanhood. Primitive man thinks of the cultivation of the soil as being magically dependent for success on woman and connected with child-bearing.[84]

We may mention a few examples. According to the Cherokees, the corn is supposed to have been discovered by the first woman.

> When she died, she gave directions that her body should be dragged over the earth; wherever it touched the soil there sprang an abundant crop.[85]

A legend current among the Tupis of Brazil tells of a young woman conceived without intercourse and gave birth to a snow-white child. The child died after a year and was buried. Presently, from its grave there arose a plant that bore fruit. That was the first manioc plant on earth.[86]

> In New Zealand the same ritual precautions and taboos apply to a woman who is with child and to one who has a patch of sweet potatoes under cultivation. The Nicobar Islanders consider that seed will germinate and prosper best if it is planted by a pregnant woman. Similar ideas are current in Europe. The peasants of Southern Italy believe that whatsoever is sown and planted by a pregnant woman will grow and increase as the foetus in her womb.[87]

The basic idea behind all these is clear. 'The fecundity of the earth and the fecundity of women are viewed as being one

[81] Briffault M iii. 3.
[82] *Ib*. iii. 117.
[83] *Ib*. ii. 560.
[84] *Ib*. iii. 54.
[85] *Ib*. iii. 2.
[86] *Ib*. iii. 54, iii. 2.
[87] *Ib*. iii. 55.

and the same quality.'[88] A peasant-song of modern Greece still retains the core of this archaic belief:

> A Jewish maiden reaps the corn; Ah! the maiden is with child. At times she reaps, at times she stoops and leans upon a wheat-sheaf, and she bears a golden child.[89]

The manifestation of this fundamental idea is widespread. Briffault has even suggested that the idea is *universal*: 'the assimilation of the fruit-bearing soil to the child-bearing woman is universal.'[90]

If the idea of agricultural production involved in this primitive belief be poor, so was that of human reproduction. It took ages for humanity to understand the causal connection between coition and conception. Some of the Australian and American aborigines are apparently still left at such a backward stage of knowledge as is yet to discover this connection. They believe that they get children within their womb directly from the mother earth:

> At Nierstein, in Hessia, as among the Australian and North American aborigines, the women believe that they get their children from a cave in the earth; and they assert that if you place your ear to the ground in the neighbourhood you can hear quite clearly the cries and voices of the unborn. The apostles of Christianity in northern Europe had great trouble in combating such beliefs.[91]

In some other places, the same belief persists in other forms. It is manifested in placing the child just after its birth on the ground, the idea evidently being that the earth is the mother of the child.

> (The custom) was honoured by the Romans, and is similarly observed by very rude savages. The Veddahs of Ceylon, for instance, place the child on the ground.... The same thing is done by the Tupis of Brazil, and by the African natives on the Gold Coast and in Central Africa.... In Sicily it is believed that if a child is not laid on the earth immediately after it is born it will certainly die in hospital.[92]

The commonest Sanskrit word for childbirth is *bhumistha*, i.e. being placed on the earth. Evidently, it tells its own story.

There are, thus, two aspects of this ancient belief. On the one hand, the plant-producing activity of the earth is viewed as magically depending upon the reproductive capacity of the female body. On the other hand, the reproductive capacity of the female is viewed as being magically dependent upon that

88 *Ib.* 89 *Ib.*
90 *Ib.* iii. 59. 91 *Ib.* iii. 58. 92 *Ib.*

of the earth. We may look at some more examples of the manifestation of the belief in its second aspect.

It is a countrywide custom in India that women, desirous of children, hang a piece of stone or a lump of earth on a tree. The tree is thus made to bear fruit and the expectation is that the women, too, would be similarly fruitful.

In other instances, fruits and vegetables are placed on the lap of woman desiring children. Frazer pointed out that the same belief is manifested in many other India-wide customs:

> Again, the tree-spirit makes the herds to multiply and blesses women with offspring. In Northern India the *Emblica Officinalis* is a sacred tree. On the eleventh of the month *Phalguna* libations are poured at the foot of the tree, a red or yellow string is bound about the trunk, and prayers are offered to it for the fruitfulness of women, animals, and crops. Again, in Northern India the cocoanut is esteemed as one of the most sacred fruits, and is called *sriphala*, or the fruit of Sri, the goddess of prosperity. It is the symbol of fertility, and all through upper India is kept in shrines and presented by the priests to women who desire to become mothers.[93]

The beliefs, as we find them now, have largely assumed the form of religion. There is no doubt, however, that these are magical in origin.

In other instances, the same belief finds several peculiar manifestations. Barren women expose themselves to the rains, or take recourse to the act of pouring water on themselves under the idea that barrenness would thus be removed. Water, the prime giver of fertility to the earth, is also expected to make the women fertile. Natural fertility ensures human fertility.

In the Punjab, women desirous of children take recourse to bathing where the roads meet and in streets.[94] In other instances from the same area, the barren woman is made to sit on a stool which is lowered into a well. She strips off, bathes, dresses and is then drawn up. When it is not possible for her to descend the well, the rite of bathing is performed under a tree. It is believed that the rite absorbs the fertile energy of the well or the tree and infuses the same into the woman. The well dries up, the tree withers away and the woman conceives.[95] Among the Kandhs, the barren woman is taken by the priest to the confluence of two streams and water is sprinkled on her.[96]

93 GB 119. 94 Kaul CR (Punjab) i. 235.
95 Rose CR (Punjab & N.W. Frontier Province) i. 164.
96 NINQ i. 47.

Among the Koi Gonds, water is poured on the head of the bride and, in the lower Himalayan region, on her hands.[97]

Similar beliefs are observed elsewhere: 'The fertilising rains and all the flowing water which fecundate the earth can also fecundate women.'[98]

Bushmen women and girls are careful to take shelter during a shower, for the rain from heaven which fertilises the earth would impregnate them also. Hottentot women believe that it would be impossible for them to have any children unless they had first stood naked in a thunder-shower. Australian women likewise believe they can be impregnated by the rain. A Mongol princess conceived through the operation of a hail-storm.[99]

There are examples, again, of the reverse expression of the same belief. The female fertile energy is looked at as an aid to the making of rain that fecundates the earth. Following are some well known examples.

During the Gorakhpur famine of 1873-74, 'parties of women, at night time, stripped themselves naked, went out of their houses, and, taking the ploughs with them, dragged the same across their fields.'[100] Again, on the occasion of a long standing drought in Mirzapur,

three women from a cultivator's family, stripped themselves stark naked, all male folk having been excluded from that place beforehand. Then two of these nude women were yoked like oxen to a plough; while the third held the handle of the plough with her hands. Thereafter they began to imitate the action of the ploughing.[101]

Again,[102]

Whenever a drought occurs in Northern Bengal the women-folk of the Rajbamsis or Kochs, . . . strip themselves stark naked and, in that state of nudity, dance before the image of their rain-god.

Chaubey[103] and Desai[104] have reported on similar practices in Gujarat, 'specially of labour classes, namely of Kurmi, Nunia, Kahar, Chamar, Dasadh, and Dhamka castes.'

Practices like these are in fact widespread in other parts of the world.

In the Caucasian province of Georgia when a drought has lasted long, marriageable girls are yoked in couples with an ox-yoke on their shoulders, a priest holds the reins, and thus harnessed they

97 JRAS xiii. 430.
98 Briffault M iii. 56.
99 *Ib*. ii. 452.
100 JANSB xii. 921.
101 *Ib*. 921.
102 *Ib*. cf. Risely TCB i. 498.
103 BV vi. 175-8.
104 JGRS vi. 22-7.

wade through rivers, puddles, and marshes, praying, screaming, weeping, and laughing.[105]

Elsewhere, there is neither prayer nor a male priest in this magical performance.

In a district of Transylvania, when the ground is parched with drought, some girls strip themselves naked, and, led by an older woman, who is also naked, they steal a harrow and carry it across the fields to a brook, where they set it afloat.

Frazer noted the essential similarity of this with the rain-making rituals of India. In Servia,

in seasons of drought, a girl is stripped naked and then draped with flowers. In this state of semi-nudity, she dances at every house of which the *mater familias* comes out and pours upon her a jar of water while her companions sing rain-songs.[106]

Evidently, the idea behind all these is to infuse into nature the fertile energy inherent in the female sex.

It may be noted that even at a comparatively later stage of development of human knowledge, when the connection between coition and conception was understood or at least vaguely understood, the old magical belief in its dual aspect largely persisted. The corn-bearing earth remained assimilated to the child-bearing woman. As a consequence, on the one hand, the reproductive function of the female was viewed as something enhancing the productivity of nature, while, on the other hand, natural fertility was imagined to be an aid to the human reproductive capacity, particularly that of the female.

4. Origin of Durga-Puja

How far this archaic belief assimilating the Mother Earth with the human mother went into the making of the great goddesses of the ancient world, is a subject exhaustively treated by Briffault.[107] We shall mention here only one example from Hindu religion, particularly because it has a direct bearing on the origin of Tantrism.

The *Markandeya Purana* has a well known section called *Devi Mahatmya*,[108] that is the glory of the goddess. In this, the goddess herself makes a rather startling declaration:

105 Frazer GB 71. The next quotation is from the same page.
106 Crooke PRFNI 39.
107 M iii. 54 ff.
108 Cantos 81-93.

Next, O ye gods, I shall support (i.e. nourish) the whole world with the life-sustaining vegetables, *which shall grow out of my own body* (*atma deha samudbhavaih*) during a period of heavy rain; I shall gain fame on the earth then as Sakambhari.[109]

The name Sakambhari is striking. It is rendered as 'the herb-bearing,' or, 'the herb-nourishing.' The idea is further explained by the declaration of the goddess that the life-sustaining plants would grow, during the rains, from *out of her own body*. Under this name, therefore, lies buried a piece of very archaic belief that the plants originally grew out of the female body. We have seen living examples of this belief among the backward peoples like the Cherokees and the Tupis.

Interestingly, a concrete evidence of this belief has been unearthed by the archæologist at Harappa (FIG. 2). Marshall[110] described it as

.... a very remarkable oblong seal from the Harappa (Plate xxii, 12), on which a nude female figure is depicted upside down with legs apart and with a plant issuing from her womb.



FIG. 2

There is also an inscription in six letters on the seal (FIG. 3), which, in all probability, has some light to throw on the extremely interesting name, Sakambhari.

We may be yet far from deciphering the Indus script. Meanwhile, it may be noted that the idea depicted on the seal found expression in other phases of Indian culture (FIG. 4). Marshall[111] observed:



FIG. 3
Indus Seal.
Note the connection of the female deity with the plants.

Although unique, so far as I am aware, in India, this striking representation of the Earth Goddess with a plant growing from her womb is not unnatural, and is closely paralleled by a terracotta relief of the early Gupta Age from Bita in the United Provinces, on which the goddess is shown...in much the same posture, but with a lotus issuing from her neck instead of from her womb.



FIG. 4
Yaksi and Tree:
Kusana Period.

109 *Ib*. Canto 92, *Sloka* 43-44.
110 MIC i. 52.
111 *Ib*.

The connection of the goddess with vegetation is thus clear. Chanda[112] noted this some years before the Indus excavations. He also pointed out that certain well known names of the goddess, like *Annada* and *Annapurna*, are to be understood from this angle.[113] The former means, 'the giver of food', the latter 'she who is full of food.' Further, the connection between the plants and the female deities is borne out by the importance of the *kula* plants in Saktism:

> Another aspect of Saktism that demands notice in this connection is the worship of the *kula* trees. The very first duty enjoined upon a Sakta on rising from bed very early in the morning is the salutation of the *kula* trees with the formula, *Om kulavriksebhyo namah.* According to the *Kulacudamani*, 'the worshipper should salute the *kula* tree whenever he sees it.' The author of the *Saktananda Tarangini* reproduces two different lists of the *kula* trees.... It is said of *kula* trees, 'The *kula yoginis* always dwell in all these *kula* trees. No one should sleep under the *kula* trees nor injure them.[114]

However, of all the observations made by Chanda in this connection, the one connecting the origin of the Durga-*puja* with the vegetation world is probably the most important. Unfortunately, the author has not gone into sufficient details of this ritual and has overlooked some of its more significant features. We shall discuss these specially.

To begin with, it is necessary to remember that the image of the Great Goddess with ten arms and riding a lion, however much familiar to us, has, really speaking, little to do with the actual ritual that forms the essence of the Durga-*puja*. How this image came to be associated with Durga may be an interesting problem for our historians to solve; nevertheless, there is no doubt that the association is comparatively late and the central ritual of the Durga-*puja* is not much affected by it. As Bandopadhyaya[115] said, even a century back the icon-makers of Bengal knew nothing of the ten-armed lion-riding goddess surrounded by her sons and daughters. The fact is, as the author rightly insisted, though so much of pomp and grandeur is now lavished over this image, the real worship in the Durga-*puja* has very little to do with it. Instead of that, it is some ritual centred in the *purna ghata* (FIG. 5) and the *yantra*.

What, then, are these?

Purna ghata is an earthen vessel filled with water. This is how it is placed: Five varieties of corn-seeds (*panca sasya*) are

112 IAR Ch. iv.
113 *Ib.* 134.
114 *Ib.* 135.
115 *R* (B) ii. 265.

scattered on a lump of flattened and square-shaped clay. Then an earthen vessel, filled with water is placed on it. Rice, mixed with curd, is put into the vessel. Round the neck of this vessel is tied a piece of red thread. Its open mouth is covered with five varieties of leaves. Then an earthen-plate with rice and a betel-nut is placed on the leaves. On the plate of rice, again, is placed another fruit, preferably a green cocoanut with its stalk intact. The fruit is smeared with vermilion. On the surface of the vessel is drawn the picture of a human baby with vermilion paste; it is called the *sindura puttali*. This is the *purna ghata*.[116]



FIG. 5
Purna-Ghata

The flattened square-shaped clay, on which the vessel is placed, has a diagram drawn on it, called the *sarvatobhadra mandalam* (FIG. 6). It is one of those well known diagrams of Tantrism, known as the *yantras*. Its centre is occupied by the picture of a lotus with eight petals (*asta dala padma*). As we have already observed, in Tantrism this *padma* or lotus is invariably a symbolic representation of the female genital organ.

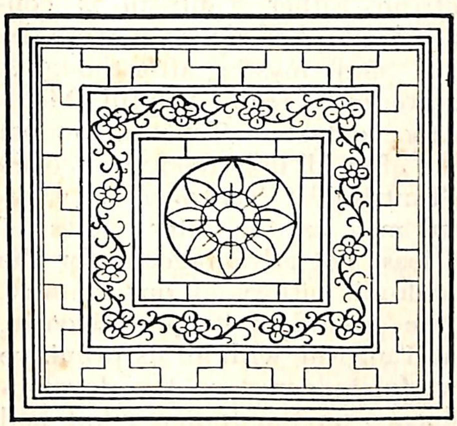


FIG. 6
Sarvatobhadra Mandalam

We may now easily see the significance of the *purna ghata* being placed on the *sarvatobhadra mandalam*. Plants and fruits are brought into contact with the female reproductive organ. The same idea is repeated in the *purna ghata* itself. The vessel is the female womb;[117] that this womb is with a baby is indicat-

[116] *KKV*(B) i. 239.

[117] Neumann GM 39 ff.

ed by the picture of the *sindura puttali*. It is, thus, an enactment of human reproduction; the symbolic significance of the use of vermilion only confirms the point. But why this enactment of human reproduction? Obviously to ensure the multiplication of the fruits, plants and leaves. That is why these are brought in contact with the female reproductive organ. We are thus back to the magical belief that the productivity of nature is ensured or enhanced by the imitation or contagion of human reproductivity or, more particularly, female reproductivity.

This is the original significance of the Durga-*puja*. There is hardly anything in it that can be called spiritual or religious in the strictest sense. It is just agricultural magic.

5. Lata-Sadhana and Yantras

Judged by modern standards, there is probably nothing more morbid and disgustingly obscene than the sexual theories and practices of Tantrism. This explains the two attitudes of modern writers on ancient Tantrism. Either Tantrism is condemned outright or its obscenities are hushed up, as it were, by covering these up with spiritual and mystic after-thoughts. However, neither of the two attitudes is really helpful. Metaphysical subtleties discussed in the context of Tantrism do not help us to understand it; these are after all only modern theories fancifully superimposed upon Tantrism.[118] Tantrism is primitive, however much sophisticated may be the later views of it. Yet it would be wrong, at least not advantageous for the purpose of understanding the cultural history of our country, to reject Tantrism outright on the ground of its primitiveness. There is no denying the fact that Tantrism, with all its primitive peculiarities, exercised very powerful influence on the development of Indian culture. Its influence on the Indian mind had really been much deeper than is ordinarily suspected. The peoples of this country, for how many centuries we do not exactly know, attached tremendous importance to these very theories and practices. However morbid and absurd the survivals of Tantrism in the modern times might be, different significances altogether must have originally been attached to it. Since we have outgrown the conditions of those ancestors of ours, there is no need to rationalise these significances. But there

[118] See sec. 9 of this Chapter.

is the question of *understanding* these. For it is necessary to know how we have become what we are today.

With these preliminary remarks we may now proceed to understand certain fundamental features of Tantrism.

In Tantrism, we find the greatest emphasis being placed on the ritual centering round the female genital organ. The usual word for it is *bhaga,* though, according to the terminologies peculiar to Tantrism, it is often called *lata,* lit., the creeper. The ritual centering round it is, thus, called *bhaga yaga,* lit., the ritual of the female genitalia, or *lata sadhana,* i.e. the ritual practice concerning it. It is to be noted that a similar emphasis on the female organ is expressed in the Tantrika *yantras,* i.e. the symbolic representations of the same.

It may be useful to begin with a quotation from Thomson.[119]

> In North America, when the corn is attacked by grubs, menstruating women go out at night and walk naked through the fields. Similar customs still survive among the European peasantry. Pliny recommended as an antidote to noxious insects that menstruating women should walk through the fields with bare feet, loose hair, and skirts drawn up to the hips. Demokritos, according to Columella, held the same opinion; the women, he said, should run round the crop three times with bare feet and flowing hair. The idea was evidently to diffuse the fertile energy with which the female body was believed at such times to be charged. Elsewhere the energy is regarded as inherent in their sex. Among the Zulus, for example, the girls who perambulate must be naked but need not be actually menstruating at the time. This is the origin of the well known women's rite of exposing the genitalia by drawing up the skirts—a rite which in Greece was specially associated with Demeter; and the custom common to many Greek cults of female votaries walking in procession without shoes, head-bands or girdles belongs to the same circle of ideas.

We have already noted that the basic feature of the rain-making rite, as practised by the women-folk of our backward peasantry, is to take recourse to nudity. The idea is that the female reproductive organ, thus exposed, would enhance natural fertility. This idea is, as a matter of fact, universal among peoples surviving at the backward stages of economic development. We may note a few more examples.

Among the Hidatsas,[120] the women, while taking part in the agricultural ritual, strip themselves naked. A prominent feature of the rain-making ceremonies of the Baronga women and of the rites of the various women's societies in the Congo,

[119] SAGS i. 206.
[120] Briffault M iii. 4.

which has so much scandalised the civilized observers, consists in the stark nudity of the women performing these.[121] 'The rites of the women of barbarian Europe were marked by the same indelicate character.'[122] Similarly, the Flemish women had to perform their rites in the state of nudity.[123] 'British priestesses danced naked painted with woad.'[124]

It is a universal rule that a witch, in order to perform her incantations effectually, must divest herself of all clothing. In ancient Greece and Italy witches stripped when performing their magical operations.[125]

These are only a few of the vast number of examples cited by Briffault. We want to add to this list a very significant example to which Needham[126] has recently drawn our attention. Ritual nakedness, he shows, had been an important characteristic of the shamanistic practices of the Chinese Taoists. Moreover, this nudity had special relevance for rain-making. This is particularly significant because of the close similarity between Tantrism and Taoism, which we shall presently discuss.

Readers interested in Indian examples may look up Crooke's [127] well known article 'Nudity in India, in Custom and Ritual.' 'Nudity,' he observed, 'is essential in many magical rites and appears prominently in rain magic.'[128] However, the explanation suggested by him is manifestly wrong.

The possible explanation of the custom is that clothing pollutes the magician, and its absence indicates absolute submission to the will of the Higher Powers.[129]

Crooke here overlooked the essential characteristic of magic and its distinction from religion. There is, in magic, no question at all of submitting to the Higher Power. The purpose, on the contrary, is practical. By exposing their reproductive organs these women are trying to coerce nature to produce. We may quote Briffault[130] again:

All religion, not only in its crude and primitive phases, but in its highly developed forms in the great civilizations of India, of Babylon, of Egypt, of Greece, is pervaded with conceptions, symbols and practices which, in our modern European view, appear the very reverse of religious and holy.... That fact is commonly expressed by saying that the generative powers of nature have everywhere been the object of worship. But the statement is rendered unsatis-

[121] *Ib.* iii. 204.
[122] *Ib.* iii. 205.
[123] *Ib.*
[124] *Ib.*
[125] *Ib.* iii. 208.
[126] SCC ii. 135.
[127] JRAI xlix. 247.
[128] Crooke RFNI 71.
[129] *Ib.*
[130] M iii. 207.

factory by the obscurity attaching to the latter term. The word 'worship' does not express the rationale or motive of any primitive religious phenomenon; the objects of primitive cults are not such by virtue of their being worshipful, but by virtue of the practical utilities or dangers that are supposed to derive from them.

Perhaps the word *magical* would have been more appropriate than the words *primitive religious phenomenon.* Nevertheless, the fact remains that at the later stages of cultural development, when magic had lost its original significance and became religion, the old belief in the efficacy of the female reproductive organ survived, though not with the original significance attached to it. This is the clue to the *bhaga yaga* and *lata sadhana* of the Tantrika texts. But original Tantrism is immeasurably older than the written treatises on it. As such, the stupendous importance attributed to the female genitalia in Tantrism is to be traced back to the belief in the magical efficacy attributed to it in primitive thought. However, before we proceed to examine the specific case of Tantrism, it may be advantageous for us to review certain instances of the survival of this primitive magical belief in the religious systems of the other peoples.

Briffault has drawn our attention to many examples in which ritual nudity, that is, direct resort to the exposure of genitalia, formed an important feature of the religious functions. Evidently, the same idea underlies the use of models of the female organ. An interesting example of this is unearthed by the Indus excavations.[131] In the famous shrine of Kamakhya,[132] the image of the goddess is nothing but the *yoni,* the female genital organ. Other instances are mentioned by Briffault. It should further be noted that when the magical functions were transferred from the women to the men, the human productive power was considered largely to be centred also in the male organ. By an extension of the same rule, therefore, on the one hand, even the male priests were to strip themselves,[133] while, on the other hand, emblems and models of the phallus began to be widely used in religious functions. 'In ancient Egypt the women carried phallic images operated by strings, as is still done in West Africa and the Congo.'[134] Athenian women of the most noble families did the same thing at the Thesmophoria[135]

[131] Marshall MIC i. Pl. XIII. 7.
[132] *VK*(B) q.v. *Kamaksya.*
[133] Briffault M iii. 209. Cf. Crooke RFNI 71 ff.
[134] Briffault M iii. 205. [135] *Ib.* iii. 206.

and the phallic emblems formed part of the cult of Vesta, the patroness of matronly virtue.[136] 'The obscenity,' Briffault[137] commented, 'is no more a gratuitous manifestation of depravity in Africa than it was in Rome.'

We may now return to the problem of *bhaga yaga* and *lata sadhana* in Tantrism. From the point of view of our argument, we may expect to find the importance placed on the female genitalia in Tantrism being linked up with the source of natural fertility and, as such, with material prosperity.

Inspired solely by the Tantrika tradition, *bhaga* is looked at as the sum total of all the six forms of material prosperity, called *sadaisvarya*.[138] How the word denoting the female organ came to mean the source of all conceivable forms of material wealth, is a question which is not generally asked. But it is a valid one and there can be only one answer to it. According to primitive belief, the female organ *is* the source of all material prosperity. It may be objected that the sense of *being the source of wealth* is older. It occurs in this sense even in the earlier parts of the *Rig Veda*.[139] If this were really so, we have only to look at our question from a different angle: How did the word originally denoting material wealth come eventually to be used for the female organ?

That material wealth was conceived in Tantrism mainly in agricultural terms, is evidenced by the other word used in the *Tantras* for the female genitalia, viz., *lata*. The literal meaning of *lata* is plant or creeper. In Tantrism, however, it stands for the female organ. Evidently, some relation between the two is imagined in Tantrism.

That the relation between the two is an intrinsic feature of Tantrism is evidenced also by the *yantras*.

Yantras are complex diagrams. It is sometimes suggested[140] that the Tantrikas attach so much importance to these because gods are supposed to descend to take their seats on these. Such explanations are fictitious from the real Tantrika point of view. A Tantrika, when he really confides in you, will frankly confess that these diagrams are but representations of the female organ. Competent scholars have in fact repeatedly noted this point. Bhandarkar[141], for example, observed as follows on the *sri cakra*

136 *Ib.* 137 *Ib.*
138 *VK*(B) xiii. 222.
139 We shall discuss this in Chapter VIII.
140 *VK*(B) xv. 545. 141 VS 146.

or the *sri yantra* which he considered to be a feature of the genuine form of Tantrism:

It consists in the worship of a picture of the female organ drawn in the centre of another consisting of a representation of nine such organs, the whole of which forms the *Sri Cakra*.

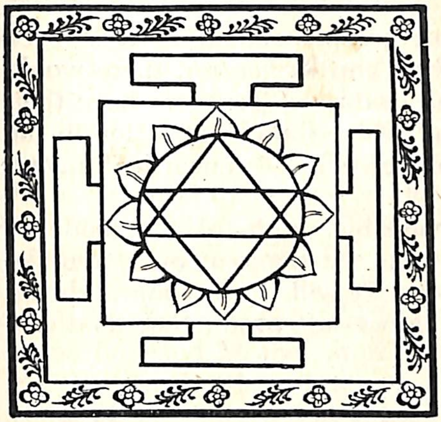


FIG. 7
Yantra

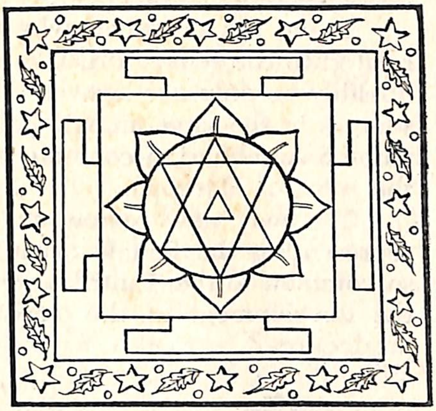


FIG. 8
Yantra

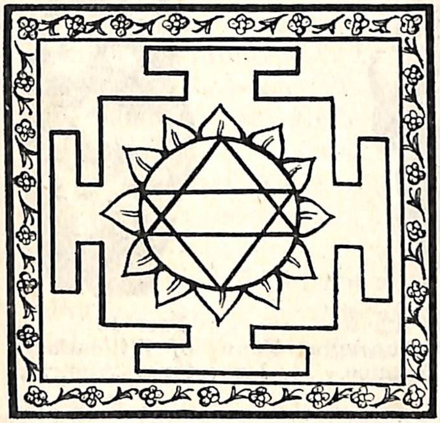


FIG. 9
Yantra

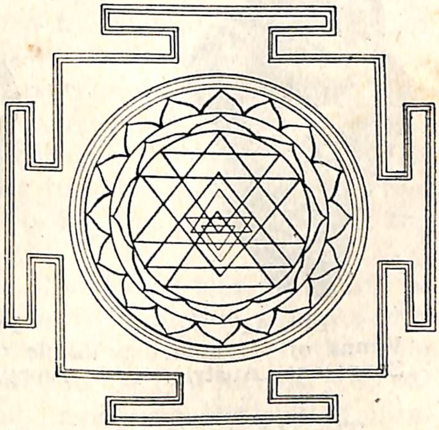


FIG 10
Sri-yantra

There are in Tantrism various *yantras* (FIGS. 7-10) bearing different names and the *Sri Cakra* is only one of them. But the essential feature in all of them is the same. It consists in the representation of the female organ either by the picture of a lotus (*padma*) or by the diagram of a triangle, usually by both.

This is not something new. What is generally overlooked, however, is the significance of another important feature of the *yantras*. In majority of the *yantras*, we also see *the picture of a creeper surrounding all the four sides of the centrally represented female organ.* This creeper is called the *kalpa-latika* (lit., the wish-yielding creeper).

If we ask ourselves why the creeper should so closely be related to the female organ in the Tantrika *yantras*, there would possibly be only one answer. The *yantras* of Tantrism have their sources in the same archaic belief which found expression in the name Sakambhari, a concrete relic of which is unearthed among the ruins of Harappa.

We may now review the possible origin of the mode of representing the female organ with the diagram of a triangle, so common to the Tantrika *yantras*. It will throw some light on the development of the early ideas of production and reproduction.



FIG. 11
Venus of Menton.
Soapstone, Austria.



FIG. 12
Venus of Lespugne.
Ivory. France.



FIG. 13
Venus of Willendorf.
Limestone, Austria.

The oldest extant piece of statuary was discovered in Lower Austria (FIG. 13). It belongs to the upper palaeolithic stage and is called the 'Venus of Willendorf.'[142] It is the figure of a fat, giant-hipped, heavy-breasted and nude woman, probably representing the state of pregnancy. That this could not be an object of art in our sense is evidenced by the fact that it was found

[142] Limestone found near Kremas, Austria (Aurignacian).

painted with red ochre, a circumstance definitely pointing to its ritual use. Evidently, she was a fertility goddess. What deserves to be noted, however, is that in spite of the nudity, little importance was attached to the genitalia; apparently the emphasis was on the breasts and the womb. This is significant. In certain other statuaries of the upper palaeolithic period we find similar emphasis being laid on the breasts.

These early figurines (FIGS. 11-13) obviously belong to a stage of development of human knowledge where the role of the genitalia in the reproductive process was not known. One of the earliest view was that conception began in the breasts;[143] later the child descended to the abdomen. It is conjectured, that the idea originated from the circumstance of the early signs of pregnancy appearing on the breasts. Such belief is still found to persist among the Sinaugolos[144] of British New Guinea. It was probably from such a view of things that the image of the many-breasted Mother arose among the Aztecs.[145] She was also the Mother Earth, conceived as an aid to natural fertility. The same idea evidently formed the basis of the Ephesian Artemis, who was also conceived as a many-breasted woman and was, originally, conceived to enhance the fertility of the earth.[146] It may be remembered that the primitive technique of emphasising the importance of a thing is either to magnify its size or to multiply its number. If the breasts were originally viewed as being specially related to human reproduction, then the palaeolithic mothers with their highly exaggerated breasts, like the Mother of the Aztecs and the Artemis of Ephesus with their multiple breasts, were only taking recourse to the reproductive principle for the purpose of enhancing the productivity of the earth.

But mankind did not remain stranded at this poor level of understanding the mystery of human reproduction. Progress was gradually made towards a more advanced view of the role of the female genital organ in the reproductive process. Accordingly, in the next stage, we find emphasis being shifted from the breasts to the genital organ. Evidently, the *bhaga yaga* and *lata sadhana* of Tantrism had their source in such a stage of human knowledge. This is also illustrated by a series of well known images of female deities in ancient days (FIGS. 14-22). Significantly, in a large number of these, we find a distinct ten-

143 ERE x. 242.
144 *Ib.*
145 ERE v. 129.
146 *Ib.*

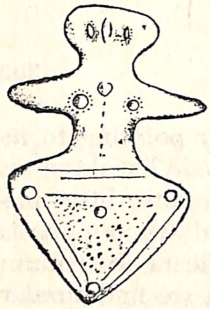


FIG. 14
N.-W. Frontier, India.

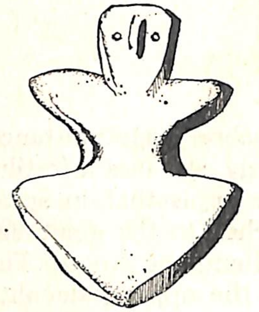


FIG. 15
Mesopotemia
(3000 B.C.)

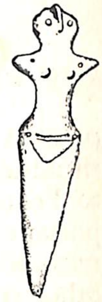


FIG. 16
Ukraine

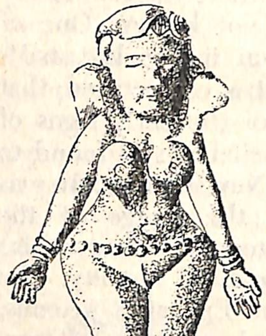


FIG. 17
India.
(C. 800 B.C.)

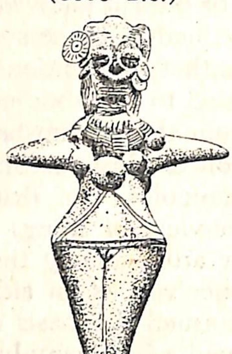


FIG. 18
Indus



FIG. 19
Phoenicia.
(C. 2500 B.C.)

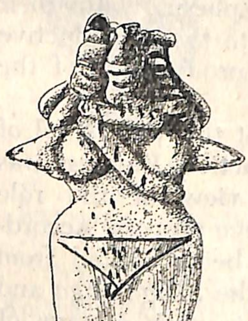


FIG. 20
Mesopotemia
(C. 1400 B.C.)



FIG. 21
Egypt.
(C. 2000 B.C.)

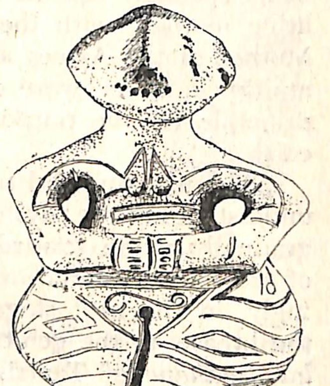


FIG. 22
Thrace.
(Neolithic)

dency to represent the female genitalia with the diagram of a triangle. Presumably, the clue to the triangles of the Tantrika *yantras* is to be sought in this tendency.

6. The Khapuspa

Before the Bhils[147] begin sowing they set up a stone at the top of the field and smear it with vermilion. Why do they do it? What is the significance attached to the vermilion? We are goining to argue that the vermilion stands here for the menstrual blood. And since in primitive thought menstrual blood is viewed as the basis of human reproductivity, the act of smearing it on the stone is designed to infuse the productive energy into the field. This alone can explain the tremendous significance attached in Tantrism to the menstrual blood or its substitutes. We begin with Thomson:

> It is important to observe that the magic of human fecundity attaches to the process, not to the result—to the lochial discharge, not to the child itself; and consequently all fluxes of blood, menstrual as well as lochial, are treated alike as manifestations of the life-giving power inherent in the female sex. In primitive thought menstruation is regarded, quite correctly, as a process of the same nature as childbirth.
>
> This magic is ambivalent. Its very potency makes it something to be feared. ... From one aspect the woman who may not be approached is inviolable, holy; from another aspect she is polluted, unclean. She is what the Romans called *sacra,* sacred and accursed. And hence in patriarchal society, after woman has lost her control of religion, it is the negative aspect that prevails. Not only are her sexual functions treated as impure in themselves, but the same condemnation attaches to her feminine nature as such. She becomes the root of all evil, Eve, a witch.
>
> These ideas are universal. There is no sphere of human life in which a greater uniformity can be observed than in the treatment of menstrual and puerperal women. The subject is discussed at length by Briffault, who has collected examples from every branch of the human race and every stage of culture.[148]
>
> Aristotle, Pliny, and other naturalists, ancient and medieval, believed that the embryo is formed from the blood retained in the uterus after the stoppage of menstruation. This is the blood of life. Hence the commonest method of placing persons or things under a taboo—menstrual, lochial, or any other interdict formed on this original pattern—is to mark them with blood or the colour of blood. And in keeping with the ambivalent nature of the taboo itself this sign of blood has the double effect of forbidding contact and imparting vital energy. It is a world-wide custom for menstruating or pregnant women to daub their bodies with red ochre, which serves at once to warn the men away and to enhance their fertility. In many marriage ceremonies the bride's forehead is painted red—a sign that she is forbidden to all men save her husband and a gua-

[147] Crooke. RFNI 250. [148] SAGS i. 205.

rantee that she will bear him children. This is the origin of cosmetics. Among the Valenge, a Bantu tribe, every woman keeps a pot of red ochre, which is sacred to her sex and used to paint her face and body for ceremonial purposes. Of the many occasions for which she needs it the following may be noted. At the end of her confinement both mother and child are anointed with it: in this way the child will live and the mother is restored to life. At initiation the girl is painted red from head to foot: so she is born again and will be fruitful. At the conclusion of mourning, after stepping over a fire, the widow is painted the same colour: so she returns from the contamination of death.

Red is renewal of life. That is why the bones from upper palaeolithic and neolithic interments are painted red. The symbolism becomes quite clear when we find, as we commonly do, that the skeleton has been laid in the contracted or uterine posture. Smeared with the colour of life, curled up like a babe in the womb—what more could primitive man do to ensure that the soul of the departed would be born again?[149]

We may mention here only one or two typical examples of the survival of this primitive belief in the later religions of India. In Bengal,

it is currently believed that at the time of the first burst of rain, Mother Earth prepared herself for being fertilised by menstruating. During that time there is an entire cessation from all ploughing, sowing, and other farm work.[150]

The religious ceremony of the day is called *amvuvaci.* Similarly, in Travancore,

there is a very important periodic ceremony performed in the temple. This is known as *trippukharattu,* or purification ceremony, in connection with the menstruation of the goddess, which is believed to take place about eight or ten times a year. The cloth wrapped round the metal image of the goddess is found to be discoloured with red spots, exactly as in the case of menstruation. The discoloured cloth is sent up to the ladies of the Vanjipuzha or Talavur Patti houses for examination, and, on its being passed by them, the image is removed to a separate shed, the inner and principal shrine being closed for the period. The cloth is given to the washerwoman and never used again for the goddess. There is a great demand among the people for the discoloured cloth, which passes as a holy relic.[151]

In Chunganur, too, great importance is attached to the menstruation of goddess Parvati.[152] Similar is the case of the goddess Kamakhya of Assam.[153] If the origin of Tantrism is to be traced to the magical belief confounding the productive and reproductive processes, it is only natural to find great importance attached in it to the menstrual blood.

149 *Ib.* i. 209-10.
150 Gait CI i. 189.
151 Briffault M ii. 435-6.
152 *Ib.* ii. 436.
153 *VK*(B) *Kamaksya.*

The Tantrikas have a technical term for it. It is usually *kusuma* or *puspa,* sometimes mystically called the *khapuspa.* This terminology too suggests a close affinity to the plant-world. *Kusuma* or *puspa* means flower. The plant yields fruits, just as the female organ bears babies. Thus the female organ is called *lata* or the plant. Again there is flower before the fruit, just as menstruation comes before pregnancy. So the menstrual blood is called the flower—the *kusuma* or *puspa.*

The Tantrika literatures go into great details over the question of menstrual blood. Bloods of different types of women are given different names.[154] This aspect of the discussion does not interest us much. What is necessary to remember is that certain practices of the Tantrikas, like those concerning the use of vermilion or the choice of the blood-red colour for their clothes, derive their significance from the same belief.

The belief, as it survives today, is of course a superstitious dross. And nothing will probably appear to our modern taste to be more vulgar and repulsive than the elaborate Tantrika discussions of it. There is nothing to wonder at the archaic belief becoming a superstition today; it is simply the result of the advances in technology and knowledge. However, the sense of uncleanliness we frequently attach to the menstrual blood, probably owes its origin to another factor. It is a new superstition replacing the older one. It is largely because of our patriarchal preoccupations that we fail to view the menstrual blood objectively.

7. The Five Ma-s

'How, O Devi (goddess), could one repeat the Candi *mantra* without "The Five,"' says a Tantrika text.[155] 'The five *ma*-s, O *Devi,* are pleasing to the gods,' declares another.[156] Many more texts lay a similar emphasis on The Five or, more specifically, The Five Ma-s.

The Five, so reverentially referred to, are *madya* (wine), *mamsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (fried corn) and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). Since all these words begin with the letter *ma,* these are technically referred to as *pancamakara,* the five *ma*-s.

The list is no doubt appalling. Those among the modern

154 *Ib.* vii. 522.
155 *Ib.* vii. 532.
156 *Ib.* vii. 531.

scholars who have tried to rationalise or justify Tantrism, have naturally found the *pancamakara* to be the greatest stumbling block. Efforts are made to mystify it: the real significance of *pancamakara* is too subtle or too hidden to be understood by the uninitiated. Or, as is sometimes said, the practices are not for the ordinary men; only the spiritually advanced could go in for these. Or, the practice of the *pancamakara* is difficult and dangerous—more difficult, in fact, than walking on a razor's edge and playing with wild tigers.[157] And so on.

Justifications like these do not interest us. Their apparent absurdities only betray the weakness of the position sought to be justified. Advanced technology and greater knowledge of the laws of nature make it difficult for us either to admire or justify these archaic practices. It is necessary, however, to *understand* them. And this understanding cannot come unless we try to view them from the position of our remote ancestresses who, with the discovery of agriculture, were only beginning to advance towards civilization.

Of the five *ma*-s, we shall specially discuss *madya* and *maithuna,* i.e. the ritual resort to wine and sexual intercourse. 'There can be hardly any objection to sanctioned meat, fish and fried corn,' says a contemporary scholar,[158] 'yet we feel doubtful as to how wine and sexual intercourse could be features of a religious practice.'

Yet the *Tantras* are quite categorical on the importance of both. There cannot, for example, be any *sadhana* (ritual practice) without the use of wine. As one of the texts declares,

> There cannot be any *siddhi* (ritual success) whatsoever without wine; therefore, you must drink it carefully, and make her drink too, and only then you should utter the spells.[159]

Obviously, this cannot be accepted as the philosophy of a civilized people. But we shall have to understand this in the light of what is generally known about primitive peoples surviving today.

The Oraons,[160] before transplanting the rice-seedlings, make a libation of rice-beer on the ground. The Baigas,[161] after clearing the forest and determining the boundary of the cultivable area, periodically circuit round the village limit, scattering a line of wine along the boundary. The work is entrusted to the

157 Bandopadhyaya *R*(B) ii. 251.
158 Bhattacharya *TP*(B) 56.
159 *VK*(B) vii. 526.
160 Crooke RFNI 250.
161 *Ib.* 83-4.

Baiga magician, who often gets drunk himself while performing it. He is then supposed to acquire great magical power,– 'a quasi-divine afflatus', as Crooke has put it. Crooke rightly suggested that the same idea, namely that liquor is the vehicle of magical power, lies at the root of the ritual of the Gonds round the Mahua tree. They distil their liquor from the corolla tubes of the Mahua, and this liquor is used by them 'in various religious and domestic rites.' Other examples of the ritual use of liquor for the purpose of averting the diseases or of ensuring the fertility of the fields may be found in Crooke.[162]

Why should the liquor be thus looked upon as a promoter of magical power, and more specifically, as an agent that could enhance the fertility of the field? The answer is that in primitive thought it is, like blood, taken as a life-giving principle. This will be evident from two sets of examples. In the first set liquor is resorted to for the purpose of overcoming death. In the second the use of liquor is designed to ensure birth. Thus it is the agent that overcomes death and ensures birth.

That wine overcomes the contamination of death is evidenced from the following:

> The Irish wake is a familiar example of the practice of drinking to celebrate death. In West Africa the Tshi people drink heavily during the fast which follows a death, and the mourners are generally intoxicated. The same is the case among the Yorubas. But it is chiefly after the funeral that drinking is the rule of the feast.
>
> At funerals among the Woolwa Indians there is much drinking of *mishla*. A long line of cotton is stretched, like a telegraph wire, from the house of the dead, where the drinking takes place, to the burial-ground where the body has been deposited. 'I have seen the white thread following the course of the river for many miles, crossing and re-crossing the streams several times.' As soon as a Bangala man dies, the family gets in large supplies of sugar-cane wine. Dancing and drinking are carried on for three or four days and nights, or until the wine is finished. The Guiana Indians drink and dance at the funeral feast.
>
> Among the Tshinyai of the Zambesi the native beer, *pombe*, plays a considerable part in post-funeral rites. For the ceremony of *Bona*, a large quantity is prepared. Holes are bored above the grave and *pombe* is poured in. In one hole, in front of the house where the grave is, the mourners wash their hands with *pombe*. As the procession retires, a widow, of the deceased (she is called *musimo*, the spirit), her head covered with calico, constantly calls out for *pombe*, which she drinks beneath the covering. At the house of the head widow a large hole is dug and well cemented. This is filled with *pombe* and every one lies down and drinks it without help of spoon or vessel. A feast follows, consisting of *pombe* and meat.[163]

Similar use of wine in the funeral rite is not at all un-

[162] *Ib*. 100, 119, 127, 133, 176, 422. [163] ERE v. 79-80.

common in India, particularly among the so-called depressed classes. Evidently, wine in these rituals are designed to overcome the contamination of death and to ensure the renewal of life. One of the commonest name for locally made wine in India is *sanjivani,* or *mrita sanjivani,* that which gives life, or, that which gives life to the dead.

The same belief probably explains the use of wine in the initiation rites, the essence of which is death and rebirth: the child, as child, dies, and is born again as an adult. It is no wonder, therefore, that wine, as the life-giving agent, should find an important place in these rituals.[164]

In primitive society, initiation is followed by marriage and marriage means the preparation for the act of procreation. As is to be expected, therefore, drinks, in various ways, play an important part in marriage rituals.

> At Tipperah weddings the bride receives a glass of liquor from her mother. She takes this to the bridegroom, sits on his knee, and, after drinking some of the liquor, gives the rest to him.... Among the Nakri Kunbis of Thana, liquor is given to the pair when the wedding ceremony is completed. The girl relatives of the Khyoungtha bride bar the entrance to the village against the bridegroom with a bamboo. Across this he has to drink with them a 'loving-cup of fraternity' before he is allowed to enter. At weddings in Morocco the priest hands to the pair a cup of wine which he has blessed. When both have drunk of it, the glass is dashed to the ground by the bridegroom, with 'a covert meaning that he wishes they may never be parted until the glass again becomes perfect'.... Among the Larkas, a cup of beer is given to each of the two parties; they mix the beer, and then drink it. This completes the marriage. In Moluccas, Japan, Bengal, Brazil, Russia, Scandinavia, and many districts of Europe, the bridal pair drink, at the marriage ceremony or part of it, wine or beer from one vessel. At Beni-Israel weddings, the bridegroom pours wine into the bride's mouth. In Korea and China the pair drink wine from two cups, which are tied together by a red thread. In Christian countries the rite is separated from the marriage ceremonial proper, but is carried out indirectly when the pair receive together the wine of Communion, which is to be partaken of immediately or soon after the marriage itself. Among the Gonds, the respective fathers of the bridal pair drink together.[165]

Probably one of the best known examples of the belief in wine inducing the reproductive urge in the human being is retained in the creation-legend of the Santals.[166]

> From two birds' eggs came the two original human beings, a boy and a girl, called Haram and Ayo. They had no clothes. Still they felt no shame, and they lived in great peace. But they were not multiplying their own species. So one day, Lita, the principal

[164] ERE v. 80.
[165] *Ib.*
[166] JASB (sc) xix. 12-4.

bonga or spirit, came to them and said: 'Where are you grandchildren? How are you? I am your garndfather; I have come to pay a visit. I see you are well; but there is one great joy that you have not tasted. Do brew beer, it has a very sweet taste.' Then he taught them how to prepare beer. All three went to the forest. Lita showed them the roots. The two dug up and brought these. Then they learnt to prepare beer. Then Lita said to them: 'Now both of you drink this after first having poured on the ground some to Lita. Tomorrow I shall come again and visit you.' Thereupon they made three leaf-cups and filled them with beer; having done this, they poured on the ground the contents of one in the name of Lita; then they drank themselves. When they were drinking, they commenced to enjoy amorously; continuing this they both drank all and also became very drunk. It became night; they lay down together. When it became dawn Lita suddenly came. He called out to them: 'How is it, grandchildren, have you got up or not? Do come out.' When they regained consciousness, they recognised that they were both naked and felt very ashamed. Therefore they answered to him, 'O Grandfather, how can we possibly go out? We are awfully ashamed. We are both of us naked. Last night when we had become drunk from beer, we have done something bad.' Lita then said to them, 'It does not matter.' And smiling to himself he went away.... Now they got children, seven boys and seven girls.

The implication of the legend is quite clear. The original human pair were led to the discovery of the beer, without which there was no reproductive function. So in primitive thought wine is the agent that helps men not only to overcome death but also to create new life. Like blood, it is the principle of life itself.

How far the psycho-physical effects produced by liquor were at the root of such a view may be an interesting subject for investigation. The presumption is that it was largely so. Intoxication could easily have been mistaken for a state of being possessed by some life other than that of oneself. It is because of some such idea that wine is frequently used by the shamans and priests for chemically inducing the state of inspiration. Briffault[167] has mentioned some interesting examples. All these obviously go back to the primitive idea concerning the magical efficacy of liquor, particularly of its life-giving aspect. It is here that the ritual use of wine for enhancing fertility of the earth is to be sought. From this point of view, therefore, the emphasis laid in Tantrism on the use of wine appears to be only logical.

Some of our traditional scholars, in defence of Tantrism, argued that the ritual use of meat and wine in Tantrism cannot

[167] M iii. 133.

be objected to, for it is not extrinsic to the Vedic orthodoxy itself.

> That the provisions of the Tantra which relate to the *panca-tattva* are opposed to the *Veda,* is a notion which is declared by the Indian Tantrika pandits to be erroneous.[168]

The use of meat and fermented liquor, it is pointed out by them, was quite popular among the Vedic peoples and it formed part of their ritual system.

We shall confine ourselves specifically to the use of wine. The commonest form of wine used by the Vedic peoples was called *soma.* It occupies an overwhelmingly important place in the Vedic literatures. *Soma* was also a Vedic god and the important ritual centering round it (*soma-yaga*) is quite well known. Curiously, this fermented liquor is looked upon in the Vedic literatures, as the agent with which men can overcome death and attain immortality. 'We have drunk the *soma* and have become immortal,'[169] declared a Vedic poet.

The more significant, though comparatively less used, of the intoxicating drinks, was *sura.* This word is retained in the later times as the name for alcoholic drinks in general. Evidently, it was stronger than *soma* and its use was more specifically restricted to ritual purposes. It formed part of the *vajapeya, sautramani,* and other Vedic rituals.[170] What is particularly significant from the point of view of our argument is that, in the Vedic literatures, this *sura* was related to 'the ceremonial rituals in connection with fertility magic,' a point already noted by the advanced Vedic scholarship of today.[171]

What, therefore, do all these—particularly the ritual use of the *sura* in the Vedic literatures really mean? Does it mean, as some of the modern Tantrika pandits have claimed, that the *pancatattva* of the *Tantras* has the sanction of the ancient Vedic usages? Such a view would be fantastic, if for no other reason than this that the *madya* of the Tantrika *pancamakara* is but the ritual use of wine intrinsically related to the supreme importance of the female principle. In other words, the Vedic and the Tantrika views are fundamentally different and as such it is futile to justify the latter by the former. Nevertheless, the ritual use of *soma* and *sura* in the Vedic literatures has its own interest. Like many other characteristic Vedic

168 Avelon PT *Pref.* xxxiv. 169 *R.V.* iv. 48. 3.
170 Keith RPV 339, 352-3, 265, 384, etc.
171 *Ib.* 91.

practices, it represents the survival of the primitive past of the Vedic peoples themselves. They were predominantly pastoral, and as such the necessity of the fertility ritual was not felt by them so keenly as by the early agriculturists. As we have already seen, the intensity of the magical beliefs and practices is greatest at the initial stage of agriculture. This is the reason why the use of *sura* could not attain that overwhelming importance in the Vedic view as in Tantrism. Yet, as an evidence of the survival of primitive belief in the Vedic literatures, this ritual use of *soma* and *sura* shows that the early Vedic peoples, whose cultural inheritance later Brahmanism so proudly claimed, were believing and behaving in much the manner in which the Oraons and the Baigas in India still do; besides the so-called lower castes of the country, who are still attributing great significance to the use of wine in the funeral and the marriage rituals, being backward, retain a close parallel to the early Vedic beliefs and practices, which later Brahmanism with all its hatred for these so-called lower castes, tried to justify.

We may now proceed to discuss the other *ma* of the *pancamakara,* namely *maithuna* or the sexual intercourse.

Frazer,[172] referring to the spring and summer festivals of Europe, observed:

> 'We may assume with a high degree of probability that the profligacy which notoriously attended these ceremonies was at one time not an accidental excess but an essential part of the rites, and that *in the opinion of those who performed them the marriage of trees and plants could not be fertile without the real union of the human sexes.*

It may be difficult, he added, to come across this archaic belief in its original form in the civilized Europe of today.

> But ruder races in other parts of the world have *consciously employed the intercourse of the sexes as a means to ensure the fruitfulness of the earth;* and some rites which are still, or were till lately, kept up in Europe can be reasonably explained only as stunted relics of a similar practice.

Evidently, the practice reflects a stage of the development of human knowledge at which the connection between coition and conception was rightly understood. Therefore, the logic of the practice is that coition, which ensures fertility of the human beings, would magically enhance the fertility of the earth.

Following are some of the evidences mentioned by Frazer.[173]

The Pipiles of Central America, abstained from sexual intercourse for four days before sowing,

[172] GB 135-6ff. Italics added. [173] *Ib.* 136ff.

in order that on the night before planting they might indulge their passions to the fullest extent; certain persons are even said to have been appointed to perform the sexual act at the very moment when the first seeds were deposited on the ground.

This sexual intercourse was considered by them to be a duty 'in default of which it was not lawful to sow the seed.'

In some parts of Java, at the time of the blooming in the rice field, the peasants take their wives to the fields at night and 'engage in sexual intercourse for the purpose of promoting the growth of the crop.'

Certain practices of the European peasants represent the survivals of the same belief. 'In some parts of Germany at harvest the men and women, who have reaped the corn, roll together on the field.'[174] In the Ukraine 'the young married people lie down in couples on the sown fields and roll several times over on them in the belief that this will promote the growth of the crops.'[175]

Briffault[176] made the following observation:

The rites immemorially associated with the multiplication of the tribe's food were, when that food came to be derived chiefly from the cultivation of the soil instead of from hunting, naturally extended to the promotion of the earth's fertility by ritual magic. The belief that the sexual act assists the production of an abundant harvest of the earth's fruits, and is indeed indispensable to secure it, is *universal in the lower phases of culture.*

It is necessary to remember one point about this ritual intercourse. Often it also represents a ceremonial reversion to the ancestral practice of sexual communism, i.e., collective sexual relationship, or group-marriages.[177] To the civilized observers, therefore, it may very easily appear to be a case of mere sexual licence. But that would not be correct.

It would be unjust to treat these orgies as a mere outburst of unbridled passion; no doubt they are deliberately and solemnly organised as essential to the fertility of the earth and the welfare of man.[178]

Briffault[179] observed that this traditional licence was *originally regarded with a very different sentiment.* This is further evidenced by the fact that a sanctity, which often appears to us to be almost religious in character, is attributed to this ritual promiscuity.

174 *Ib.* 137.
175 *Ib.*
176 M iii. 196. Italics added.
177 Thomson SAGS i. 67
178 Frazer GB 137.
179 R. Briffault M iii. 196.

Bearing these in mind we may quote some well known examples:

Among the Peruvians the festival held at the ripening of the *palta,* or alligator pear, was preceded by a period of severe fasts and abstinence. Men and women then assembled naked, and at a given signal ran a race, and every man had intercourse with the woman he caught. Similar yearly festivals at which sexual licence was unchecked took place in Chile, in Nicaragua, among the tribes of New Mexico, and are observed by the native tribes of Mexico at the present day. The sacred festivals of Jurupari among the Uaupes and other tribes of the Amazon region are scenes of unrestricted sexual licence in which old and young join without restraint. Among the Choroti every ritual dance is followed by public promiscuity, and similar rites are observed among the Bororo. Among the Patagonians the chief religious festival, or Kamaruko, concludes with a general sexual orgy. Among the tribes of the plains of North America and of the lower Mississippi valley the harvest festivals were attended with general licence, and the old men and women exhorted the younger ones to indulge without restraint.[180]

In the Leti, Sarmata, and some other groups of islands which lie between the western end of New Guinea and the northern part of Australia, the heathen population regard the sun as the male principle by whom the earth or female principle is fertilised.... Once a year at the beginning of the rainy season, Mr. Sun comes down into the holy fig-tree to fertilise the earth.... On this occasion pigs and dogs are sacrificed in profusion; men and women alike indulge in a saturnalia; and the mystic union of the sun and the earth is dramatically represented in public, amid song and dance, by the real union of the sexes under the tree. The object of the festival, we are told, is to procure rain, plenty of food and drink, abundance of cattle and children and riches from grandfather sun.[181]

Among the Dayaks of British North Borneo, at the festival called Bunut by which the fertility of the soil and a plentiful harvest of paddy are secured, general licence takes place lasting exactly a quarter of an hour, after which perfect order and beseemingness are restored.... In the Malay Peninsula, during the rice-harvest the men of the Jakun tribes exchange wives.[182]

A huge mass of evidences like these are amassed by Briffault.[183] But let us now take some example from our own country.

The greatest festival of the Santals is called the Sohrae. Modern scholars have already noted its obvious bearing on agriculture. This is how one of them has described the festival:

Five days are spent in dancing, drinking and debauchery. It is significant that, at the commencement, the village headman gives a talk to the village people in which he says that they may act as they like sexually, only being careful not to touch certain women; otherwise they may amuse themselves. The village people reply that they are putting twelve balls of cotton in their ears and will not pay any heed to, nor hear or see, anything.[184]

180 *Ib.* iii. 196-7.
181 Frazer GB 136.
182 Briffault M iii. 197.
183 *Ib.* iii. 196-209.
184 Bodding SD v. 336.

The sexual licence said to be general during the Maghe festival in Kolhan, and also during the other festivals, is not of a promiscuous nature. The use of obscene language by the Hos during the Maghe festival when sons revile their parents and parents their children, has been misinterpreted by Col. Dalton. Such customs as we find among the Hos are not unique, or without parallel elsewhere... (it) is an essential agricultural rite.[185]

Both among the Eastern and Western Rengmas (a Naga tribe), the vice of prostitution for gain is absolutely unknown; but in the latter group sexual morality, though strict in some villages, is very lax in others. Everywhere laxity is at its height during the season of sowing. The reason given is that more liquor is drunk then but it is more probably true that there is an almost unconscious belief that the union of the sexes will in some way make the fields fertile.[186]

The Konyak village of Wakching provides the best example I know of the belief that the sexual act is beneficial to the food supply. There rich men arrange for young men to screen off little sleeping places on the verandahs of their granaries and bring girls there for the night. The arrangement is with individuals, and any young man who so desires will have a granary verandah allotted to him for the purpose.[187]

Here is another interesting example of how much importance is attached by the Nagas to the sexual act for the purpose of achieving agricultural success. A part of the agricultural operations they observe is known as the path-clearing ceremony.

Zemi (Kacha Nagas) villagers of the Pelekima group make by a path they clear at this time a model of the sexual organs in coition. The female organ is exactly modelled in clay, with dry grass representing the pubic hair, while a wooden stake serves for the male organ. Parties of young men and girls going to and from the fields stop by these models, while one of the young men works the stake in an appropriate way, to the great amusement of the rest of the party.[188]

Crooke pointed out that the original purpose of the Holi festival was to promote the fertility of men, animals and crops and it was characterised by 'the most licentious debauchery and disorder.... It is the regular Saturnalia of India.'[189]

In the yearly agricultural festival of the Parganait of the Rajmahal Hills, the unmarried of both sexes indulge in promiscuous sexual intercourse.[190] During the spring festival of the Bhuiyas of Orissa, 'all respect for blood-relations and husbands is set at nought.'[191] The Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills observe a festival of continuous licentiousness.[192] During the spring festival, the women-folk of the Assam-tribes behave as they like,

185 Majumdar AT 143.
186 Mills RN 43.
187 *Ib.* 43n.
188 *Ib.* 83n.
189 F xxv. 83ff.
190 IGI (revised ed.) xxii. 68.
191 CR ciii. 188.
192 Briffault M iii. 198.

without 'any stain, blemish, or loss of reputation.'[193] Similar festivals are observed in Khondistan, among the wild tribes of Manipur and Northern Burma.[194]

More examples of such rituals and ceremonies are not necessary. However, to show how much the early ideas concerning agriculture were linked up with those of the sexual act we may mention here the following interesting philological data quoted by Bagchi:[195]

> Besides 'the plough,' the Sanskrit word *langalam* designates also 'the penis.' On the other hand, specially in the *Sutras* and the *Mahabharata*, a form *langula* is found to mean both 'the penis' and 'the tail' (of an animal).... From 'penis' one can pass, without difficulty, to the sense of 'plough' and 'tail.' There are evident analogies between copulation and the act of ploughing, by which one digs up the earth for depositing the seeds. The problem becomes more complicated from the fact that, almost invariably, the word *linga* which strongly resembles the two other words, and has the meaning of 'penis' comes in.

Bagchi himself subscribed to the view that these words were originally Austro-Asiatic. So he referred to the following further evidences:

> Besides the Santals have a common word '*la*'—'to dig or make a hole.' The derivatives like *langalam*, etc. express the penetration of plough into female earth. The names of 'penis' and of 'plough' therefore, signify respectively in the languages in question (Austro-Asiatic), 'the limb which one drives in.'[196]

The hypothesis is further strengthened by the actual instrument used by the Austro-Asiatic peoples for the purpose of tilling.

> Some Austro-Asiatic peoples use even today, not a plough to furrow, but a simple pointed stick for digging holes in which they place the seeds.... There the analogy between penis and the farming instrument is as clear as possible.... The farming stick in Melanesia and Polynesia has often the form of a penis. In some Polynesian languages, the same word designates the 'penis' and the 'digging stick.' It is possible that the aborigines of India at first knew the use of this stick and the name of the instrument for digging the soil has not changed after the introduction of the plough.

Whether all these actually prove the Austro-Asiatic influence on Sanskrit language or not, is a different question. From the point of view of our argument, however, these linguistic evidences are highly interesting. Obviously, there is something more in these than mere superficial similies or comparisons. The

193 Butler TAPA 226.
194 Briffault M iii. 198-9.
195 Bagchi PAPDI 10.
196 *Ib.* 13.
197 *Ib.* 14.

idea of sowing and digging are fused with the idea of coition. The two processes are viewed as essentially alike.

Significantly, corresponding to the use of the plough, we have here an instance of viewing coition from the male point of view. There are other reasons, too, for this. Whether it owed anything to the language of the aborigines or not, Sanskrit was after all the language of the Vedic tradition. It was the tradition of the predominantly pastoral and therefore highly patriarchal people. Nevertheless, what is particularly significant is the fact that the scanty references to agriculture that we have in the literatures of those pastoral-patriarchal peoples, are almost invariably looked upon as similar in nature to human coition. Planting the seed is like depositing semen in the female womb.

The *Taittiriya Samhita*[198] recommended the following spell for agricultural purposes:

Yoke the ploughs, stretch apart the yokes,
Here sow in the womb made ready the seed,
Through our song be there audience with profit for us;
May the ripe (grain) be brought low by the sickle.

Similar thoughts are traceable in the other *Samhitas*. Vedic poets, thus, closely linked up agricultural process with human coition.

Perhaps the most interesting passage is to be found in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita*.[199] Modern Vedic scholars have felt rather shy about the passage. To our sense of decency and morality, it is revoltingly obscene. It comprises of a series of dialogues between the Vedic priests, called Adhvaryu, Udgata, Brahma, and their female partners, called Kumari, Vavata, Mahisi. The dialogues go into somewhat lurid details of the sexual act. What particularly interests us, however, is that throughout this coition-dialogue there runs the refrain of an obviously agricultural theme: *shite vate punanniva*. As the commentators explained, it means 'as a peasant, drying the paddy (seeds), quickens (the sowing) by taking it and releasing.'

Following is a free rendering of a portion of the passage along with the best known commentary on it:

Raise her up as you carry a load on the mountains; then let her middle region be expanded. As (the grain) is dried in cold wind. (*Vaj. Sam.* xxiii. 26).

198 iv. 2. 5. 5. Tr. Keith 315. 199 xxiii. 22ff.

Uvata's commentary: The Udgata unites with the Vavata. (He) asks someone, 'Raise this woman. Raise up this Vavata high.' How? As a load is carried up clasping it at the middle; thus clasping her at the middle, fix her high up. As in the place, i.e., so raise her that the waist and the genital region of this Vavata may be extended. So hold her as it may expand. As a peasant, drying the paddy (seeds) quickens the sowing by taking these and releasing.

Raise him up as you carry a load on the mount. Then let his middle region begin to function. As (the grain) is dried in cool wind. (*Vaj. Sam.* xxiii. 27).

Uvata's commentary: In reply, the Vavata told the Udgata: 'Thou, too, should be made to act in a similar way. Here the female is playing the role of the male. As a load is carried up hill. Then let his middle region begin to function, i.e., be engaged in the reproductive function. Then press him down. As a peasant, drying the barley (seeds) in cool air quickens the sowing by taking these and releasing.

And so on. The same obscenity was exchanged between the other Vedic priests and their female partners. Judging it in its context, the passage was obviously intended to be of very great ritual importance. It formed part of the *Asvamedha*. The sexual act is viewed here as an aid to natural productivity. 'It was necessary for these 'queens' to conceive in order that the earth might bear fruit.'[200] The obscenity of the language, moreover, was highly purposive:

The operation of the divine generative power which brings about the fertility of nature, of animals, of women, is believed to be stimulated not only by sexual intercourse, but also by any act or *speech of a lascivious and sensual character*.[201]

This is why the obscene jests and speeches formed so important an aspect of primitive fertility ritual.

We may now return to the question of Vedic *kamacara*, many examples of which are quoted in the first chapter. The explanation for such peculiar ideas in the Vedic literatures is not difficult to find. The ancestors of the Vedic peoples, like those of all the peoples all over the world, were once living under primitive conditions and viewed sexual intercourse as a technique to enhance the fertility of nature, including that of the cattle. This archaic belief of their own ancestors came down to the authors of the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanisads*, and they were trying to rationalise it in their own way. Obviously the Tantrika emphasis on the sexual union had for its source the same primitive belief.

200 Thomson, SAGS i. 158.
201 Briffault M iii. 204. Italics added.

A few points are to be noted about these survivals of *kamacara* in the Vedic literatures as contrasted with the *kamsadhana* of Tantrism.

First, the natural fertility this sexual union is supposed to enhance, though occasionally conceived in agricultural terms, is, in the Vedic literatures, predominantly pastoral in spirit.

Secondly, consistent with the partiarchal society in which they lived, this emphasis in the Vedic literatures on the sexual union, had an obvious male bias about it. As the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*[202] said,

> If she should not grant him his desire, he should bribe her. If she still does not grant him his desire, he should hit her with a stick or with his hand and overcome her.

We may add here another interesting evidence of this male bias.

The terms traditionally used in India to refer to the patriarchal and the matriarchal systems are *bija pradhanya* and *ksetra pradhanya.*[203] The terminologies are evidently derived from the sexual-agricultural circle of ideas we are discussing. *Pradhanya* means predominance. But *bija* and *ksetra* have double meanings. Ordinarily these mean 'the seed' and 'the agricultural field' and the use of the word in this sense is traced as far back as the Rig Vedic times.[204] Similarly, *ksetra* also means 'the fertile womb' of 'the wife' and the legal literatures have often used the word in this sense.[205] From the *bija pradhanya* point of view, therefore, the human child is the product primarily of the male semen just as the corn is primarily the result or effect of the seed-grains. This represents a male bias and is naturally associated with the patriarchal system. From the *ksetra pradhanya* point of view, however, the human offspring is primarily the product of the female womb just as the corn is born primarily of the agricultural field. It represents a female bias and is naturally associated with the matriarchal system. The relics of fertility magic in the Vedic literatures, since these obviously represent the seed-point-of-view, are to be characterised as *kamacara* with a pronounced male bias. We have already seen how the pastoral economy of the Vedic peoples was logically responsible for this male bias in their fundamental outlook.

202 vi. 4. 7.
203 Sen *BS* (B) 11.
204 Monier-Williams SED 732.
205 *Ib*. 332.

Thirdly, in spite of these scattered relics of the *kamacari* beliefs and practices in the Vedic literatures, these could assume neither the overwhelming importance nor the extraordinary elaboration as in Tantrism. The reason is, as we have suggested, that the initial stage of agriculture in which Tantrism had its origin, is necessarily characterised by a peculiar intensity of magical beliefs and practices, the parallels of which are not to be found in any other phase of technological development.

We shall presently see more of this Tantrika emphasis on the sexual union while discussing its *dehavada* and cosmogony. Before that, however, it may be useful to clarify certain mistaken ideas about Tantrism in general.

8. Meaning, Antiquity and Sects of Tantra

What is meant by the word *tantra*? How old is Tantrism? What is the real significance of the differences between the different sects of Tantrism?

Some of our modern scholars[206] have raised elaborate discussions on the meaning of the word *tantra*. However, the simple meaning of the word is unfortunately overlooked. The reason is that they usually work under the preoccupation that Tantrism is essentially a mystic metaphysics having for its counterpart a course of spiritualistic practices. The plain meaning of the word, however, does not prove any of these.

The word *tantra* is derived from the root *tan* with the suffix *stran*. *Tanoti* (*tanute*) *tanyate va iti tan+stran*. The meaning of the root *tan* is 'to extend, to spread.' Spreading what? Extending what? Primarily, the human family, the number of children. The meaning, in other words, is the act of propagation. Monier-Williams[207] showed that in the *Harivamsa* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, the word is used to mean: 'to propagate.' The same point is borne out by such common words like *santana* or *tanaya* (meaning children) both derived from the root *tan*. Besides, as Monier-Williams further observed, the word *tantu*, derived from the same root, is used in the ancient texts as the *Katyayana Srauta Sutra*, *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* and the *Taittiriya Upanisad*, in the sense of 'one propagating his family in regular succession'; in the *Aitareya Brahmana* the word is used to mean 'a line of *descendants*.' Further, *tantu kartri* means 'propagating

[206] Dasgupta PE. 151ff. [207] SED 435.

the succession of a family.' Even the use of the word *tantra* directly in the sense of propagation or reproduction is not wanting. In the *Mahabharata,* for example, *kulasya tantra* is used to mean 'the principal action in keeping up a family, i.e., propagation.'[208]

More evidences like these are not necessary. The *radical* meaning of the root *tan* is to reproduce. Thus the name *Tantra,* being derived from this root, suggests procreation. This conforms to the theme of Tantrism.

We shall now pass on to examine the question concerning the antiquity of Tantrism. Efforts are made to determine the age of the *Tantras* by an examination of the written texts on the subject.[209] However, such efforts can only establish the date of this or that *individual Tantrika text,* but not of Tantrism as such. Tantrism is older than the written texts on it, and some of the written texts are of very recent date. We may mention one or two examples. The famous *Mahanirvana Tantra* is usually attributed to the spiritual preceptor of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833).[210] Another Tantrika text, called the *Meru Tantra,* is found to contain such words as *landraja* (the Londoner), *ingreja* (the Englishman), and as such cannot be much old.[211] Some of the other texts are referred to the 6th or 7th century A.D.

That Tantrism itself is older than the Tantrika texts and, as such, it is not possible to arrive at the age of Tantrism by examining the written texts available on it, is a point already noted by some of the competent scholars. We may quote a few of these observations.

> Their date, however, it is impossible to determine with any precision. The existing treatises are probably for the most part at least, reproductions with additions and variations of older works which are no longer extant. In their present form, they are usually ascribed to the 6th or 7th century of our era, but they may be considerably later. Tantrika usages and popular formulas were current and practised in a much earlier age; *they belong to a type of thought that is primitive, and among primitive peoples varies little in the course of centuries.*[212]

Bandopadhyaya,[213] one of the most eminent of our scholars on Tantrism, observed that according to some of the competent archaeologists, Tantrism is not less older than the *Vedas* themselves. There entered into India, these archaeologists think, a

208 *Ib.* 436.
209 IHQ ix 1.
210 *VK*(B) vii 508.
211 *Ib. cf. BUS* (B) i. 10n.
212 ERE xii 192. Italics added.
213 Bandopadhyaya *R*(B) ii 259-60.

race of comparatively dark-skinned Aryans, roughly during the same time when the white-skinned ones, i.e., those who composed the *Vedas,* came to this country. They began to move, it was thought, from ancient Iran or Persia towards the northern valley of present Kabul, and then, after crossing Takla Makan, entered India through Kashmir. A branch of them moved across Gandhara and reached Maharastra while another crossed over the hilly tracts and spread as far as Bengal. These were the people, the archaeologists think, who brought Tantrism to India.

The race-movement described here is picturesque. Unfortunately, however, it failed to find much support in the more advanced historical researches. This does not mean that the question of the migration of Tantrism to India is irrelevant. It was already raised by Bagchi and recently reopened by Needham. We shall presently return to discuss their points. For the moment it is important only to note that Tantrism is very old, older even than what Bandopadhyaya, on the authority of some of the archaeologists of his time, thought. Concrete material relics of Tantrism are traceable among the Indus ruins. Marshall[214] suggested this and he is confirmed by the more recent works of Prana Nath[215] and others. 'In fact there is every reason to believe that a good deal of the Indus art and hieroglyphics are intimately connected with Tantrika motifs.'[216] There is hardly any mystery about it either. The urban civilization of the Indus, drawing its wealth from the soil, could have naturally retained the relics of the beliefs and practices of the early agricultural stage. If traces of Tantrism are found among the Indus ruins then its history in India is not less older than five thousand years.

At the same time, in view of the uneven development in the country, we cannot rely too exclusively on mere chronological considerations for determining the antiquity of Tantrism. Because of their stunted economic growth, there survive in India extremely backward tribes whose beliefs and practices represent much that we come across, though in a highly magnified and complicated form, in Tantrism. In other words, there are people still living the life of the ancestors of those that built the Indus cities five thousand years ago and it is to this life that we are to trace the sources of Tantrism. Tantrism, in its original

214 MIC i 57ff.
215 IHQ vii 1-52.
216 Kosambi ISIH 54.

form, therefore, is not merely ancient; it is also modern, even contemporary.

The problem of the survival of Tantrism, however, is more complex. There survive not only the original beliefs and practices underlying Tantrism among our backward tribes, but the very culture of India bears deep marks of Tantrika influence. 'In fact,' as Avalon[217] said, 'both popular and esoteric Hinduism is, in its practical aspects, largely Tantrika.' Added Kaviraja:

> The cult of *sakti* (i.e., Tantrism), produced a profound influence on general Indian thought. A topographical survey of India would show that the country is scattered over with numerous centres of *sakti sadhana* (i.e., Tantrika practices). It was widespread in the past and has continued unbroken till today.[218]

The problem of the survival of Tantrism in this form is not solved simply by tracing its origin to the beliefs and practices of the tribal peoples living at the early agricultural phase. It needs to be presumed that concrete elements of the material conditions to which Tantrism owes its origin must have somehow or other survived in the general social fabric of later India to sustain and nourish these ideological elements. How far our hypothesis of incomplete detribalisation (Ch.III) explains this peculiarity of Indian culture may possibly be considered.

9. The Sects of Tantrism

Said Bagchi:[219]

> The Tantra still remains an enigma to us. Very little work has been done in this domain and very little attempt has been made in the interpretation of its doctrines. But the fact remains that a vast literature has been written on it—a literature which is mostly found in manuscripts.

This is true. With a vast literature on the subject, Tantrism still remains an enigma to our academic world. The reasons are complex and at times even unexpected. We shall briefly review some of these here.

To begin with, the vast literature on Tantrism, paradoxically enough, is itself a hindrance to its proper understanding. The treatises on Tantra lure us with a false promise as to its true nature. Even the elite is often deceived.

This does not certainly mean that such texts do not contain any element of genuine Tantrism whatsoever. They do. But they also contain many other things. From various quarters and

217 PT i.
218 HPEW (ed. S. Radhakrishnan) i 402.
219 ST i 45.

in various ways, alien and often hostile thoughts were continually grafted on original Tantrism, making it difficult to recover its genuine form from the texts on it.

A special difficulty arises from the circumstance that modern scholars on Tantrism generally feel more familiar with these grafted elements because these agree with their own preoccupations. They are, therefore, easily inclined to think that for the purpose of interpreting Tantrism, it is sufficient to remain confined to those thoughts and ideas which were in fact superimposed on original Tantra by the authors of the treatises on it. On the other hand, whatever is genuinely archaic in these texts appeared repulsive to them; they have, accordingly, either tried to hush up these elements or simply to condemn them outright.

We may examine some examples of these superimpositions. In one type of the texts, efforts were being made to expound Tantra within the general structure of Buddhist philosophy, more specifically, of Mahayana Buddhism. Such texts are naturally crowded with Buddhist terminologies. This has misled even the ablest among the modern scholars towards an understanding of Tantra in terms of Buddhism. Tantrism is explained as an outgrowth of Mahayana Buddhism, in fact, its decadent form. No less a scholar than H. P. Sastri put forth such a view and it has enjoyed immense popularity in our academic circles.[220]

Nevertheless, the fact remains that theories are indulged in and practices enjoined in these very texts that are far removed from the idealistic philosophy and ascetic practices of Buddhism proper. The fundamental outlook in all these texts is derived from sexual imageries and the texts are permeated with strong elements of magic. The central theme is that of the union of the male and female, though expressed in such terminologies as *sunyata* and *karuna, prajna* and *upaya, vajra* and *padma,—all* arbitrarily taken from Buddhism. *Sunyata, prajna* and *vajra* are made to stand for the male while *karuna, upaya* and *padma* for the female. The union of the two is only a union of the sexes. The ritual aspect of these texts, again, are overtly based on the practice of sexual union.

We shall quote here two eminent authorities, the only implication of whose statements is that the connection between Buddhism and Tantrism in these Buddhist *Tantras* is clearly artificial.

[220] Sastri *BD*(B) 66ff.

Following are the observations of Bose:[221]

In the Buddhist *Tantras* we come across descriptions similar to what we have just discussed about the Hindu *Tantras.* It seems that the names Siva, Durga, etc., of the Hindu *Tantras* are simply transcribed in the Buddhist *Tantras* as names of Vajrasattava, Vajradakini, etc. In the Buddhist *Tantras,* too, is prevalent the worship of Candi, Tara, Varahi etc. As in the *Tantras* revealed by Siva, bizarre deities are imagined, so in the Buddhist *Tantras* we come across deities like Heruka and others....

We have *malamantra, matrika, kavaca, hridaya,* etc., in the Buddhist *Tantras* as well. These are considered to be highly secret. It is enjoined in the Buddhist *Tantras,* too, that these must not be revealed to the uninitiated....

In the Buddhist scriptures expounding the views of the Buddha (i.e., genuine Buddhism), the five *ma*-s are strongly denounced. Buddhist Tantrikas, however, behave differently. The practice of the five *ma*-s constitutes a basic feature of the Buddhist *Tantras.* The indulgence in wine and meat, so severely denounced in the Buddhist scriptures, is extolled in the Buddhist *Tantras.*

... The Buddhist *Tantras,* too, call him who has succeeded in the Tantrika practices, a *Viranayaka.* The Buddhist Tantrikas also maintain that this world is born of the female (*vamodbhava*).

Neither are the Buddhist *Tantras* wanting in the practices of *cakrapuja, virayaga, bhagapuja,* etc.

'Buddhist Tantrism,' observed L. de La Valle Poussin,[222] 'is practically Buddhist Hinduism, Hinduism or Saivism in Buddhist garb.' If this be true then Buddhist Tantrism becomes a misnomer. As a matter of fact, this point follows from the following further observations of the same scholar on the two trends of Buddhist Tantrism:

... the two Tantrika schools maintain that all beings are *vajrasattvas,* are the unique Vajrasattva; they also maintain that the nature of *vajra* is immanent in all beings and can be actualised by appropriate meditations and rites.

Now the left-hand school conceives the nature of *vajra* according to the Saivite pattern; the right-hand school is nearer the Vedantist or Yoga tradition....

In the Tantras of the Saivite type we have to deal with a Buddhist adaptation of Saivism and Saktism. The three traditional bodies of a Buddha are preserved, but the true nature of *vajrasattva* is his fourth body, 'the body of bliss' (*ananda, sukhamaya, mahasukhakaya*), the body of *vajra;* it is with this body that the eternal *tathagata* or *bhagavat* eternally embraces his *sakti,* Tara or Bhagavati. From this erotic conception of the nature of being or divine being it follows that, in order to actualise his real divine nature, the ascetic must perform the rites of union with a woman (*yogini, mudra*), who is the personification of *bhagavati,* who is Bhagavati herself; as it is said,

buddhatvam yosidyoni samasritam.

—'Buddhahood abides in the female organ.' This truth was discovered by Sakyamuni, who, according to the *Chandamaharosama,* con-

[221] *VK*(B) vii 547. Free rendering.
[222] ERE xii 193. The next quotation is from the same article.

quered Buddhahood by practising the Tantrika rites in the *harim*. The most conspicuous topic of this literature is what is called *stri-puja*, worship of women: disgusting practices, both obscene and criminal, including incest, are a part of this *puja*, which is looked upon as the 'true heroic behaviour' (*duhkaracharya*) of a *bodhisattva*, as the fulfilment of perfect virtues. Buddhist mythology and mysticism are freely mixed with Saktas: the semen is the five Buddhas, etc. . .

Such ideas, though they have some Buddhist flavour about them, are far from Buddhism proper. In order, therefore, to understand the true nature of Tantrism, we have to look at the Buddhist elements in these texts as but the result of artificial superimposition. Instead our scholars look at the whole complex —the erotic theme with the Buddhist terminologies and all—as but a decadant form of original Buddhism.

How is it, H. P. Sastri[223] asked himself, that the originally lofty ideas of Mahayana Buddhism were, in course of time, degenerated so badly? His answer is significant. It was, he thought, the result of a rather reckless popularisation of Buddhism. Buddhism, as it spread among the masses, got contaminated with all the superstitious dross that was already prevalent among them. From being the noble religion of the selfless ascetic, it became the creed of vulgar craftsmen and other common folks.

Granting this to be true, the only conclusion we are led to is that, certain beliefs and practices were already prevalent among the masses and in the so-called Buddhist Tantrism the Buddhist ideas were somehow or other artificially related to these. If original Buddhism became Buddhist Tantrism through contamination with popular elements, then the origin of Tantrism should logically be sought precisely in these popular elements. The corollary is that in order to understand the nature of original Tantrism we have to reject its associations with Buddhism and enquire into the sources of the beliefs and practices of the low-caste peoples of the country. Sastri did not draw this implication of his own standpoint.

Incidentally, it is precisely here that we come across another reason because of which Tantrism remains so much misunderstood by our modern scholars. Tantrism, in its more original form, had really been intimately associated with those castes and professions that were despised for many centuries. Our modern scholars, on the other hand, have not always been able to emancipate themselves from this traditional contempt for the lower castes and professions. 'We must become conscious of our

[223] Sastri *BD* (B) 85-7.

own prejudices in order to correct them.'[224] This is, however, a task which our modern writers have invariably ignored. The result is that their treatment of Tantrism has not taken sufficient note of its more genuine form, i.e., the form in which it is prevalent as the beliefs and practices of the backward peoples and lower castes.

Things are, however, different with the written texts on Tantra. Being mostly compositions of the upper castes, these present Tantrism within the general structure of the accepted world-outlook of the higher castes. It is not unnatural, therefore, that most of our modern scholars should, while interpreting Tantrism, concentrate mainly on this framework. This is most evident in their treatment of the so-called Hindu *Tantras*.

Just as one type of the Tantrika texts are found grossly permeated with Buddhist ideas and terminologies, another bears strong traces of a developed Hindu religion. In addition to a whole gallery of the gods and goddesses of the Puranic pantheon, we find in these, elaborate emphasis laid on *bhakti* (devotion), *puja* (worship), *moksa* (liberation), etc. Like the Buddhist philosophy of the so-called Buddhist *Tantras*, these developed spiritualistic notions of the Hindu *Tantras* are clearly extrinsic to original Tantrism. In the Hindu *Tantras*, too, beneath the high overgrowth of the later spiritualistic ideas runs the same theme of the union of the male and the female conceived in a cosmic scale, and the same emphasis placed on the ritual union of their human counterparts. Notwithstanding all the ingenious rationalisations of the later scholars, this central theme is too archaic to agree with the ideas of *bhakti*, *puja* and *moksa*.

To show how varied were the efforts at imposing alien views on the primal essence of Tantrism, namely the ritual union of the sexes:

As the Buddhist *Tantras* try to conceive this in terms of the union of Prajna and Upaya, the Hindu *Tantras* generally conceive it in terms of the union of Siva and Sakti or Hara and Gauri. In the Vaisnava Sahajia cult, again, this is conceived as the union of Krisna and Radha or Rasa and Rati.[225] More ingenious is the effort of another type of the texts which, while bearing strong influences of Hindu or Buddhist ideas, represent a pronounced bias for alchemy. We find in them the same theme conceived in terms of the union of mercury and mica:

[224] Thomson AA 2. [225] Dasgupta ORC 134.

> Those who, without quitting their bodies have attained to new ones through the influence of Hara and Gauri (mercury and mica), are to be praised as *rasasiddha* (alchemists). All *mantras* are at their service.
>
> The ascetic, therefore, who aspires to liberation in this life, should first make to himself a glorified body. And in as much as mercury is produced by the creative conjunction of Hara and Gauri, and mica is produced from Gauri, mercury and mica are severally identified with Hara and Gauri in the verse—
>
> Mica is thy seed and mercury is my seed;
> The combination of the two, O Goddess, is
> destructive of death and poverty.[226]

The concept of liberation here is wholly physical. As the text has defined it in another place, 'having attained to mercurical bodies and therewith identified are liberated though alive.'[227] Is this an attempt to present a grossly materialistic idea within a spiritualistic framework? We shall presently return to discuss this aspect of Tantrism. For the present it is sufficient only to note that behind the rather indiscriminate use of spiritualistic and other terminologies in the texts representing the so-called different schools of Tantrism, there runs one basic theme and it is the theme of the sexual union. It is thus safe to assume that this theme is related to the intrinsic essence of Tantrism. The terminologies with which it is expressed, being variables, must have been extrinsic to it.

This point has, in fact, been admitted by the more advanced works on the subject.

> Tantrism is neither Buddhist nor Hindu in origin: it seems to be a religious undercurrent, originally independent of any abstruse metaphysical speculation, flowing on from an abscure point of time in the religious history of India.[228]

Again,

> Side by side with the commonly known theological speculations and religious practices, there has been flowing in India an important undercurrent of esoteric yogic practices from a pretty old time; these esoteric practices, when associated with the theological speculations of the Saivas and the Saktas, have given rise to Saiva and Sakta Tantrism; when associated with Buddhist speculations, have given rise to the composite religious system of Buddhist Tantrism; and again, when associated with the speculations of Bengal Vaisnavism, the same esoteric practices have been responsible for the growth of the esoteric Vaisnavite cult, known as Vaisnava Sahajia movement.[229]

If this be true then we are to look at the *undercurrent of esoteric yogic practices* to know the real nature of original

226 Ray HHC i Intro. lxxii.
227 *Ib*. i. Intro. lxiii.
228 Dasgupta ORC 27.
229 *Ib*. Intro. xxxiv.

Tantra. We have, as a matter of fact, tried to follow this procedure and were led to the view that Tantrism is neither Buddhist nor Hindu, but simply agricultural in origin. It remains for us to see, however, the connection of original *yoga* with the agricultural ritual.

As is only to be expected from such a viewpoint, this undercurrent of the esoteric yogic practices should survive more properly among the backward masses of our peasantry. Thanks to the laborious field work of scholars like Sastri and Sen, we now know that this actually is the fact. As Sen[230] has observed, there are 'hundreds of these sects silently working in Bengal' and, though their names differ from village to village, all these are brought by him under the general description of the Sahajia. All the cults are fundamentally the same. Unfortunately, however, the artificial admixture of the Buddhist elements with these sects have deceived even Sen:

> The Sahajias would by no means confess that they were Buddhists, nor refer to any Buddhist text which would make it easier to trace the doctrines to their genuine origin. In the theories themselves and in their practices, many Buddhist rites and views have left their indelible marks.... The modern Sahajias themselves do not know that they closely follow the Buddhist tenets, their ancestors concealed the fact when they were admitted to the Vaisnava order, while following them still in their rituals; and at the present stage it is the duty of a historian and scholar to thrash out the grains from the chaff and find out the true Buddhist elements in their views and practices.[231]

To 'thrash out the grains from the chaff' is indeed a correct description of the historian's task. But the question is: which is the grain and which the chaff?

10. Tantrism and the Castes

We have argued that one of the difficulties in the objective understanding of Tantrism is created by the circumstance that in its comparatively purer form it remains associated with the lowest castes and professions in the country. This is evidenced in more than one way.

We find, for example, supreme importance being attached in the *Tantras* to such characters as the Candali, Dombi, Rajaki, Savari and others.[232] These are all female names and they represent some of the lowest castes carrying on the most despised

[230] CAHA 351.
[231] *Ib.* 337-8.
[232] Dasgupta ORC Pt. I.

occupations. Again, the *Tantras* of the Kubjika school 'are said to have originated among the potters, a low-caste Hindu sect, and this is why they are said to have belonged to the *kulalikamnaya*.'[233] The *Kubjika Tantra* prescribed that the venue of the ritual practice should be the house of a potter. One of the founder-leaders of the Natha Cult, which, in essence, was a form of Tantrism, was called Goraksa, the cowherd. In another legend concerning the same cult which we come across in the early Bengali poetry *Mainamatir Gan*[234] (Song of Mainamati), the 'queen' was initiated by a Hadi, a member of a very despised caste. In many other cases of the Tantrika practices, the 'priestly' function is known to rest upon some member of a very low caste.

Being thus associated with the despised castes, Tantrism, as is to be expected, was no respector of caste distinction and caste superiority. As Avalon[235] has put it:

> We have in the Tantra, the recognition of the fine principle that this doctrine and its expression in ritual are for all, whatever be their race, caste or sex. This marks a great advance on the parochial restrictions of the *Vedas*, which are so often placed in favourable opposition to the Tantra by the English writers. The Sudra and woman are under none of the Vaidika bans.

The same point is emphasised by Sen in his discussion of the Sahajias of Bengal.

> The upper classes of our country are orthodox, but they (i.e. the Sahajias, who, according to Sen comprise mainly of the lowest classes) are not at all so. ...The proselytising work they are doing is wonderful... They gather recruits from all religions. There are Mohamedans, Christians and Brahmins amongst them... The Sahajias are free from all caste prejudices... Caste rank in society and orthodoxy of views are out of question there.[236]
>
> The sects are generally opposed to caste. In the matter of eating cooked food, where strict orthodoxy is observed by the various sects of the Hindu—nearly all these sects are without any prejudice.[237]

Indifference towards the caste system was often expressed as open revolt against it. The Tantrikas proclaimed the essential equality of all men and of all women and, along with it, the rejection of the traditional marriage morals. Anandagiri, in his *Samkara Vijaya*, described the followers of Ucchista Ganapati

[233] Bagchi ST 45.
[234] Sen TS i 98.
[235] PT Pref. xvii.
[236] CAHA 339-40.
[237] *Ib.* 352.

as belonging to the *vamacari* cult. According to him, they proclaimed:

However, according to our cult, there are two fundamental creeds (*dharma*) to be followed. All the males belonging to the various castes should be (treated) as one caste. This is one creed. All the females belonging to the various castes should be (treated) as one caste. This is the other creed. There is no sin in their mutual union or separation. There is no rule as 'Such a man is the husband of such a woman'. . . All the castes being but one caste, the institution of marriage is a fiction.[238]

This is simply startling. Nevertheless, this does represent the standpoint of real Tantrism. The following is from Dasgupta: [239]

The formal rules and regulations of religion were also severely criticised by the Sahajias. The most penetrating and scathing criticism was made by Saraha Pada in his *Dehakosa.* His first revolt is against the orthodox system of the four-fold division of colours (*caturvarna*) placing the Brahmins at the top. Saraha says that the Brahmins as a caste cannot reasonably be recognised to be the highest of men—for the saying that they dropped from the mouth of Brahma is a myth invented by a section of clever and cunning people; if, on the other hand, a man becomes Brahmin by religious initiation (*samskara*), then even the lowest of men may be a Brahmin. . . . The Brahmins take earth, water, *kusa* grass and recite *mantras* and perform fire-sacrifices in their houses—in vain do they offer *ghee* to the fire, for thereby their eyes will only be affected with intense smoke. They become holders of single-fold or of three-fold sacred threads,—but this is of no avail unless truth is realised. Deceived is the whole world by false illusion—none does know the all-excelling truth where both religion and non-religion become one. The devotees of the Lord (*Isvara*), again, anoint the whole body with ashes, wear matted hair on the head, sit within the house and light lamps and ring bells seated in a corner: they take a yogic posture (*asana*) with their eyes fixed; they whisper religious doctrines into the ears (of the credulous people) and deceive them thereby. The widows, the *mundis* (women taking the vow of fasting for the whole month) and others taking different vows, get themselves initiated by these devotees who do it only in greed of money (*daksina*).

This is not a modern socialist polemic against religion. It is merely an eloquent protest of a Sahajia poet against the caste system.

11. The Deha Tattva

In Chapter I, we have already referred to the *dehavada* and the cosmogony of Tantrism. It remains for us to analyse these in the general context of our argument, namely, the origin of Tantrism in agricultural magic.

[238] Ch. xvii. [239] ORC 62-3.

Agricultural magic rests on the principle that the productivity of nature—of the female earth—can be induced or enhanced by the imitation or contagion of the human reproductive functions. Conversely, human fertility is viewed as dependent on natural fertility.

Understandably, therefore, there is no reference in this ancient belief to either Soul, God and Liberation, Heaven, Prayer or Sacrifice; in fact none of the features we normally associate with developed religions. If we are at all justified in theoretically formulating the fundamentals of this extremely archaic belief, we may view it as the theory which assimilated the human body with nature—the two being viewed as but the two aspects of the same fundamental reality. The obvious corollaries are twofold. First, it should be possible to understand the mystery of nature if we can understand the mystery of the human body. Secondly, the birth of the universe is no more mysterious than the birth of the human baby. The *deha tattva* and the cosmogony of Tantrism are but elaborations of these two implications.

As is only to be expected, in the written treatises on Tantra this *deha tattva* remains mixed up with a host of alien ideas. We are, however, indebted to Bandopadhyaya[240] for salvaging a clear exposition of the essential points from this confused mass of ideas.

> Whatever exists in the human body exists also in the universe. *Brahmande ye gunah santi te tisthanti kalevare*—the human body is only a microcosm of the universe. This is the conclusion of all the *Tantras*. The wisdom of Tantrism is explained by all on the basis of this theory. The *Puranas* and the other *Sastras* have accepted this theory...
>
> There are, thus, two aspects of the Tantrika theory and practice. One of these is the external aspect and is concerned with the universe. The other is the internal aspect and is concerned with human body. There are two forms in which the success of the Tantrika practice manifests itself. One is the aspect of external nature, of earth; the other is the aspect of internal nature i.e., nature as human body. You can attain success by developing the forces latent in you; or, again, by controlling external or natural forces you can move towards an expression of your own internal forces.... According to the *Tantras,* since the universe and the human body are made according to the same principles and composed of the same materials, and since the same forces operate in the same manner within both,—by developing the forces inherent in the body you can have the forces of the universe in your favour, under your control. Those in the country who have attained success (*siddhas*) think that there is no instrument (*yantra*) more wonderful than the

[240] *R* (B) ii 284-5. Free rendering.

human body. None can construct an instrument as wonderful as this. So you can fulfil all your desires without the aid of any other instrument, only if you can develop and express all the forces lying dormant within this wonderful instrument, the body. The relationship between the forces lying dormant in nature and in the human body is indeed astonishing. The practices on the basis of which this intimate relationship is known, established and brought under control, constitute *tantra-sadhana.* Its basis is *deha tattva,* the cult of the body. That is why Tantra is all along so deeply concerned with the questions concerning the body.

If not materialism proper, this is at least proto-materialism. In the *Kularnava* and other *Tantras* this type materialism is of course somewhat clouded by the spiritualistic notions imposed on it. However, in the simple peasant songs of the Sahajias, the materialistic attitude survived in its original naivety. Here are a few examples:

The most important of all things is one's own body.
Thou should attain peace only when the mystery of thy body is known to thee.[241]

One who knows the mystery of one's own body
Is the most wise one; this is the message of all the scriptures.[242]

The body is at the basis of all the disciplines.[243]

Here (within this body) is the Ganga and the Yamuna, here the Ganga-Sagara, Prayaga, Kashi, here the sun and the moon. Here are all the sacred places—the *pithas* and the *upapithas.* I have never seen a place of pilgrimage and an abode of bliss as perfect as my own body.[244]

And so on. Following is how Dasgupta[245] summed up the *deha tattva* of the Sahajia songs:

Along with the uncompromising spirit of revolt against all formalities and orthodoxy in religion, great emphasis is laid in the Sahajia literature on the human body, which is conceived as a microcosm of the universe. This feature, we have hinted, predominates in all the *Tantras* in general, wherever the *yogic* element prevails; but as the Sahajias laid their whole stress on the *yogic* element, this theory of the body being the epitome of the whole universe is most emphasised.

At the same time, it needs to be noted that there had been a persistent, though obviously artificial, effort in the Tantrika texts to present this original proto-materialistic outlook as compromised with, or assimilated by a spiritualistic outlook.

In the *Hevajra Tantra* we find that the Lord (Bhagavan) was asked by a Bodhisattva whether there was any necessity at all of this physical world and the physical body, everything being in reality nothing but pure void. To this the reply of the Lord was that

[241] Bose PCSCB 44.
[242] Bose *SS* (B) Pref. ix.
[243] Bose PCSCB 45.
[244] Dasgupta ORC 104.
[245] *Ib.* 103.

without the body there was no possibility of the realisation of the great bliss and here lies the importance of the body.[246]

Or, as a *Carya*-song declares, 'Some one bodiless is hiding himself in the body—he who knows him there, is liberated.'[247]

Whatever these may be, they do not represent the true spirit of Tantrism. Nevertheless, it is really strange to see how such muddled thoughts have deceived even very eminent scholars. 'But', commented Dasgupta,[248] 'though the truth is within the body and arises out of it, it should never be confused to be something physical.' Such a comment is misleading. The search for the inner truth within the body led the Tantrikas not to any subtle non-physical spiritual principle but rather to the human nervous system in its essentially physical aspect.

We have already mentioned in brief outline the anatomy of the nervous system of the Tantrikas. Readers interested in greater details may look up Dasgupta's discussion on the subject.[249] What interests us particularly is to see how this instinctive materialism of the Tantrikas led them to contribute to the positive sciences of ancient India.

The main contribution to some of the sciences—particularly to anatomy and physiology—came in our country from the Tantrikas. They discovered long ago that the brain was the seat of consciousness.

In Caraka and Susruta (as in Aristotle) the heart is the central organ and seat of consciousness; but in the Tantrika writings (as in Galen) the seat of consciousness is transferred to the brain or rather the cerebro-spinal system.[250]

Such discoveries are of no little importance, particularly in the context of their time.

It became possible for the Tantrikas to contribute to these sciences because of their intense interest in the human body, their materialistic outlook. We shall presently see how, because of the same reason, the Tantrikas alone could contribute to alchemy and chemistry in India. By contrast, the orthodox systems—particularly the idealistic schools—were actually prevented from contributing anything to the anatomical and physiological theories because of two important reasons. First, in their zeal to discover the true nature of the self or the soul, the philosophers of these schools were too busy to pay any real attention to the body. Secondly, only the lowest castes—the

246 *Ib.* 103-4.
247 *Ib.* 105.
248 *Ib.* 104.
249 *Ib.* 106-7.
250 Seal PSAH 218-9.

Domes, the Candalas, the Hadis—could have anything to do with the dead-body, it being considered too impure to be touched by the members of the higher castes. Further, possibly the *sava-sadhana* (practices centering the dead-body) of Tantrism, however gruesome it may appear to the modern mind, helped the Tantrikas to have a deeper insight into the mechanism of the human body. Incidentally, the reluctance of the higher castes to touch and dissect the dead-body resisted scientific knowledge even in our own times: it was difficult to obtain students for the Calcutta Medical College when it was first opened.[251]

From the *deha tattva* of Tantrism we are naturally led to discuss its cosmogony. As Bandopadhyaya[252] said, the cosmogony of Tantrism was most intimately connected with its *deha tattva*, was in fact an inseparable aspect of it. The reason is simple. If the human body be viewed as but a microcosm of the universe, the birth of the universe can only be understood on the analogy of the human birth. And this is the central point of the Tantrika cosmogony.

According to Tantra, the universe was created by sexual urge (*kama*); it was born of the female (*vamodbhava*) and as the result of her union with the male. It is not difficult to see how this cosmogony is but an elaboration of the belief underlying agricultural magic.

Bandopadhyaya[253] rightly suggested that this cosmogony might have been the basis of the temple-sculptures of Orissa, so exasperating for their obscenity:

> Among the Buddhist Tantrikas there originated a sect called Kamavajrayana, based on the view that the birth of the human being and that of the universe followed the same principles.... The texts of this school are so full of obscene details as can hardly be published for the general readers. According to this sect, the universe is created by *kama* exactly as human beings are.... Their ritual practice aim at establishing a harmony between cosmic lust and human lust. They were, therefore, continually indulging in *kama sadhana*.... They exhibited this lust on the temples and monasteries.... I am of opinion that the temple of Jagannatha (Puri) was originally built under the influence of these Kamavajrayanis. The place of the goddess Vimala (the Puri temple) was sacred to them.... It was in this Sri-*mandira* (another name of the Puri temple) that the harmony was achieved between cosmic creation and the creation of the human body. In all these obscene sculptures, every male is a Buddhist monk of the Kamavajrayana school and every female is a *devadasi* or female votary. The whole temple was built on the principles of the Kamavajrayani Buddhists.

[251] Ghose *PBSI* (B) 107.
[252] *R* (B) ii 301.
[253] *Ib.* ii 305-6. Free rendering.

These observations on the possible Tantrika motif behind the temple sculptures of Orissa are certainly important. No other explanation is conceivable. Now, it might be historically true that the followers of that sect of Tantrism who built these temples had really some fascination for Buddhism, too. Nevertheless, the explanation does not gain much by emphasising this Buddhist aspect of their beliefs, for there is nothing Buddhist in the motif of these sculptures. We could understand these sculptures better if we agree to free ourselves from this Buddhistic bias. And when we do so, we are left with some form of the development of the belief underlying the agricultural magic. Presumably, the desolate ruins of Konarak, too, once witnessed the performance of agricultural magic on a gorgeous scale.

If, as we are trying to argue, this cosmogony had been the offshoot of agricultural magic, we may expect it to characterise the prehistory of other ancient civilizations. Referring to the evidences of ancient China and ancient Mesopotemia, Thomson[254] observed:

All cosmogonies of this type, which is evidently very primitive, have been classed as 'genealogical,' because they are founded on the notion that the physical universe was brought into being by a process of sexual reproduction.

Such a cosmogony, being primitive, is naturally found among the primitive peoples themselves.

Throughout this cycle of Polynesian cosmogonic myth, one fact, not without parallel in other religions, is clear. O-te-papa, the primal barren earth or rock, represents the female principle, which is fructified and made to give birth to all things living, by the fertilising rain which falls from the superincumbent male Tangaloa, the sky.[255]

The modern scholar is naturally amazed by the similarity of this Polynesian cosmogony with the Indian and Chinese ones. 'It is also noteworthy that creation is ascribed to sexual congress in cosmogonies so diverse as the Hindu, Maori and the Taoist.'[256]

'Hindu' here can only mean the Tantrika. The cosmogony of Chinese Taoism had indeed been closely similar to Indian Tantrism. The similarity between the two systems, remarkably enough, was not confined to the question of cosmogony alone. Needham, in his recent monumental work, *Science and Civilization in China,* has drawn our attention to the close similarity

[254] SAGS ii 91. [255] ERE iv 175. [256] *Ib.* iv 126.

between Taoism and Tantrism. He has also shown how the Taoist speculations about and insight into Nature, 'lie at the basis of all Chinese science.'[257] What has become clear by his discussion of Chinese Taoism, may have important light to throw on what is yet obscure—and so far basically misunderstood—about ancient Tantrism.

12. Tantrism and Taoism

Referring to the *Tantras,* which Needham sometimes considered to be 'texts on the borderline between Buddhism and Hinduism,'[258] and sometimes again, to be a 'department' or 'aspect' of Buddhism,[259] he made the following interesting observation:

> One can see at once that one is in the presence of a system of thought closely akin to the shamanist and magical side of ancient Taoism.[260]

Referring to Taoism, again, he said:

> It is necessary to say that for one reason or another, Taoist thought has been almost completely misunderstood by most European translators and writers. Taoist religion has been neglected and Taoist magic has been written off wholesale as superstition, Taoist philosophy has been interpreted as pure religious mysticism and poetry. The scientific or 'proto'-scientific side of Taoist thought has been very largely overlooked, and the political position of the Taoist still more so.[261]

We shall see how far such a view may be extended to our Tantrikas as well. But the similarities between Taoism and Tantrism first.

Corresponding to the *purusa* and *prakriti* of ancient Indian thought, we come across in ancient China the two principles of *yang* and *yin.* The former represents all that is male, light, warm, dry, hard, active; the latter all that is female, dark, cold, moist, soft, passive. These conceptions are very old. As Forke[262] remarked,

> . . . we meet with the dualistic theory of *yin* and *yang* in Confucian as well as the Taoist works. It was the first germ of a natural philosophy universally accepted by the Chinese irrespective of their religious convictions or philosophic ideas.

This is of course true, but with one important reservation to which Needham has drawn our attention:

> If it were not unthinkable (from the Chinese point of view) that

[257] SCC ii 1. [258] *Ib.* ii 425. [259] *Ib.* ii 425, 429.
[260] *Ib.* ii 426. [261] *Ib.* ii 34. [262] ERE viii 492.

> the *yin* and *yang* could be separated, one might say that Taoism was a Yin thought-system and Confucianism a Yang one.[263]

That is, Taoism, like Tantrism, had a pronounced bias for the female point of view.

> Confucian knowledge was masculine and managing; the Taoists condemned it and sought after a feminine and receptive knowledge which could arise only as the fruit of a passive and yielding attitude in the observation of Nature.[264]

Following are two examples of the feminine symbol in Taoism quoted by Needham:

The Valley spirit never dies.
It is named the Mysterious Feminine.
And the doorway of the Mysterious Feminine
Is the root (from which) Heaven and Earth (sprang).
It is the thread for ever woven;
And those who use it can accomplish all things.[265]

He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female
Becomes like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven
(Thence) the eternal virtue never leaks away.
This is returning to the state of Infancy.
He who knows the white, yet cleaves to the black,
Becomes the instrument by which all things are tested
(And so has) a constant virtue which never errs.
This is returning to the Limitless.
He who knows glory, yet cleaves to ignominy
Becomes like a valley receiving into it all things under heaven,
(For him) the immutable virtue all-sufficient.
This is returning to the Undifferentiated.
Now when the Undifferentiated is broken up
(dispersed, differentiated), it separates into discrete objects.
But if the sage uses it, it becomes the chief of all Ministers.
Truly the greatest carver does the least cutting.[266]

The analysis of the symbolism of the Limitless, the Undifferentiated, as explained by Needham, is important and interesting. According to him, these referred to the 'primitive collectivism of the villages before the full differentiation of lords, priests and warriors in bronze-age proto-feudalism,'[267] a collectivist society for which Taoism never lost its moorings.

The similarity between the Taoist poetry and the Sahajia songs is striking. It is not confined merely to the use of riddles and paradoxes. In the Sahajia songs we have already come across the Mysterious Feminine of the Taoists—the Dombi, Savari, Nairamani, Sahajasundari. In the Vaisnava Sahajia

[263] SCC ii 61.
[264] *Ib.* ii 33.
[265] *Ib.* ii 58.
[266] *Ib.* ii 58-9.
[267] *Ib.* ii 59-60.

songs, we have come across almost an identical line as 'He who knows the male and yet cleaves to the female,' etc.

The point is that in Taoism, as in Tantrism, the female point of view and the female principle were extolled over the male. Needham has argued that this led the Taoists to go 'intuitively' to the 'roots of science and democracy alike.'[268]

The female point of view led the Taoists to develop the attitude of passive observation of nature and the Taoist philosophers 'were bound in due course to pass from the purely observational to the experimental.' Thus they went to the root of science. And they went to the root of democracy too.

> How profound Taoist insight was may be appreciated by reading the brilliant essays of William Morton Wheeler, the great American entomologist, and Ernst Bergmann, which urge that the liquidation of masculine aggressiveness is one of the most important limiting factors for the success of that cooperative and collectivist society towards which mankind is inevitably moving as the scope and potentialities of the highest social organisations continue to increase.[269]

The following is Needham's concluding observation on the importance of the feminine symbol of Taoism :

> Conducting a socialist holding action for two thousand years and condemned to perpetual heterodoxy, Taoism had to retain, unborn within itself, science in the fullest sense.[270]

Such observations, to say the least, are startling. Nevertheless, it is necessary to go to the sources of the female symbol in Taoism. In the course of our discussion of Tantrism we have tried to show that the same emphasis in the *Tantras* could only be rooted in mother-right, which in its turn was due to the discovery of agriculture by women. That the female symbol of Taoism could have been connected with the early agricultural ritual is suggested by the fact of its emphasis on the water-symbol, to which Needham himself has drawn our attention.[271] The connection of the water symbol with the fertility and agricultural ritual is well known.

More important than this is the question of the relation of the female principle to mother-right. Unfortunately, Needham himself paid insufficient attention to this question, though, of course, he has not denied the possibility of there being such a connection. Referring to the primitive collectivist society, the memory of which was never washed away from the Taoist tradition, he remarked:

[268] *Ib.* ii 59.
[269] *Ib.* ii 60.
[270] *Ib.*
[271] *Ib.* ii 57.

> A parallel passage... gives a picture of primitive life before even the invention of clothes. The people were innocent, peaceful and cooperative. They 'knew their mothers, but did not know their father' (note that this is Chuang Chow speaking about matriarchy, not a modern theoretical archaeologist).[272]

'Kungsun Yang,' Needham[273] added in the note, 'says exactly the same thing in a brief sketch of social evolution (seen from the legalist point of view).... It seems very probable that matriarchal systems existed in ancient Chinese society.' Further, that this matriarchal system was presumably related to the importance attached to the female in the theory and practice of the Taoists, is a point which Needham did not overlook. Referring to the *Wu* proper, that is the shamanesses of Taoism (cf. the *yoginis* and *bhairavis* of Tantrism), he observed,

> The prominence of women here is very significant, in view of (a) the connection of the Taoist ideal society with matriarchal memories, (b) their feminine symbol, (c) their emphasis on sex techniques.[274]

Again:

> The recognition of the importance of woman in the scheme of things, the acceptance of the equality of women with men, the conviction that the attainment of health and longevity needed the cooperation of the sexes, the considered admiration for certain feminine psychological characteristics, the incorporation of the physical phenomena of sex in numerous group catharsis, free alike from asceticism and class distinctions, reveal to us once more aspects of Taoism which had no counterpart in Confucianism or ordinary Buddhism. There must surely be some connection between these things and the matriarchal elements in primitive tribal collectivism, some reflection in the prominence of the Female Symbol in ancient Taoist philosophy.[275]

We have seen in the above quotations a reference to the Taoist emphasis on sex techniques. This, as Needham has shown, is to be understood in the background of the Taoist conception of *material immortality*,[276] a conception considered by him to be 'of incalculable importance to science' because 'this ideal stimulated the development of the techniques of alchemy.'[277] Incidentally, we have already come across a similar concept in the Indian *Tantras*, and, interestingly, in those *Tantras* in particular which have a pronounced alchemical bias.

According to the Taoists, the attainment of this 'physical immortality' was dependent on a number of practices such as (1) respiratory techniques, (2) heliotherapeutic techniques, (3) gymnastic techniques, (4) sexual techniques, (5) alchemical

272 *Ib.* 108. 273 *Ib.* ii 108n. 274 *Ib.* ii 134.
275 *Ib.* ii 151. 276 *Ib.* ii 139. 277 *Ib.*

and pharmaceutical techniques and (6) dietary techniques. Some of these strongly remind us of some aspects of the *yoga sadhana* of Tantrism. The Tantrikas, too, had their respiratory and gymnastic techniques, called *pranayama* and *asana*. However, we shall for the present confine ourselves specially to the fourth one, namely the sexual techniques.

Unfortunately, as Needham has noted, owing to Confucian and Buddhist antagonism, 'these have remained much the most recondite.'[278] 'All the books concerning these arts disappeared from the *Tao Tsang* during the Ming dynasty.'[279] Nevertheless, from the fragments preserved in other works, Needham has salvaged sufficient data, on the basis of which we can see a close parallel between this aspect of Taoism and that of Tantrism.

> It was quite natural, in view of the general acceptance of the Yin-Yang theories, to think of human sexual relations against a cosmic background, and indeed as having intimate connections with the mechanism of the whole universe. The Taoists considered that sex, far from being an obstacle to the attainment of *hsien*-ship (*hsein* = True Man, the Taoist word describing the state of physical immortality), could be made to aid it in important ways.[280]

Interestingly, as in Anandagiri's description of the followers of Ucchista Ganapati, or in Gunaratna's description of the Lokayatikas, the sexual techniques of the Taoists were often carried out on group basis.

> The most astonishing aspect of this whole department of Taoist philosophical-religious practice (astonishing, too, for most modern Chinese) is that it comprised public ceremonies as well as ordinary conjugal life and private exercises for *hsien*-ship candidates. These liturgies were called 'The True Art of Equalising the *Chhi*'s,' or 'Uniting the *Chhi's*' of male and female.... The ceremony was intended for 'deliverance from guilt' and occurred on nights of new moon and full moon, after fasting. It consisted of a ritual dance, ... which ended either in public heirogamy or in successive unions of the members of the assembly in the chambers along the sides of the temple courtyard.[281]

Needham has taken the idea of 'deliverance from guilt' rather seriously. 'This,' he said, 'is commended as noteworthy to the diverse schools of modern psychology.'[282] He looked at the ceremony as a technique of 'group catharsis.'[283] But this appears to be going rather far. The idea of 'deliverance from guilt' might have been a later interpolation—apparently an arbitrary spiritual or semi-spiritual justification of the survival of an obviously archaic ritual. If Taoism was really rooted in

[278] *Ib.* ii 146. [279] *Ib.* ii 147. [280] *Ib.* ii 146.
[281] *Ib.* ii 150-1. [282] *Ib.* ii 150n. [283] *Ib.* ii 151.

primitive magic, as Needham himself has so convincingly argued, then it could hardly have any place for such a notion in it. The object of magic is essentially practical. On the other hand, the emphasis on the sexual union, sometimes in group and always overtly magical, is to be found among the primitive peoples. The idea behind it is to induce or enhance the fertility of nature, and the question of deliverance from guilt hardly arises. It is from the idea that we tried to obtain the clue not only to the obscure practices of Tantrism but also to its basic theoretical structure. If Tantrism and Taoism were really closely similar, as Needham himself convincingly argued, then we may try the same procedure for the understanding of Taoism. Unfortunately, Needham has given us the impression of being concerned primarily with the *significance* of ancient Taoism and he has paid insufficient attention to the problem of its *origin*. The question of significance is not unimportant; but it can be fully understood only when the question of origin is adequately answered. However, looking as he did at the question of origin as somehow or other secondary and unimportant, Needham has not fully exploited the possibility of the primitive rituals or magical practices having any light to throw on the obscure recesses of ancient Chinese thought. On the other hand, Thomson, dealing with the problem of ancient Greek thought, has shown how immensely fruitful the procedure may be.

With this and the further reservation that we do not with Needham propose to look at Tantrism as but an aspect or branch of Buddhism, we may very profitably follow him further in his comparison of Taoism and Tantrism.

> It is then of great interest to find that just as ancient and early medieval Taoism was deeply interested in the phenomena of sex, so also this was central of Tantrism.[284]

He has referred to the theory of *vajra* and *padma*, the practices of *maithuna* and *stri-puja* of the Tantrikas. 'The whole forms a remarkable parallel to the practices of early medieval Taoism.'[285] Again, 'It is interesting that Tantrism, like Taoism, encouraged women adepts.'[286] And he concluded, 'In any case, it is possible to find detailed parallels of much precision between Taoism and Tantrism.'[287]

The Tantrika *yoga*, e.g., laid great emphasis on the respiratory technique (*pranayama*), just as the Taoists did. 'Besides,

[284] *Ib.* ii 426
[285] *Ib.*
[286] *Ib.* ii 427.
[287] *Ib.* ii 428.

quite apart from these detailed technical resemblances, Tantrika literature is full of paradoxes similar to those so characteristic of early Taoism.'[288] Further,

Shan Wu-Wei approved of the statues showing sexual union, but warned that they were not to be placed in the public halls of Temples. So also in India, Tantrists employed a 'twilight language' with allusions not intelligible to the uninitiated (*sandhyabhasa*), a Tantrik slang.[289]

All these have led Needham to raise the question of the relation between Tantrism and Taoism.

At first sight, then, Tantrism seems to have been an Indian importation to China. But closer inspection of the dates leads to a consideration, at least, of the possibility that the whole thing was really Taoist.[290]

The dates referred to are as follows: The Taoist sexual theories and practices flourished in China between the second and the sixth centuries A.D., 'definitely before the rise of the cult in India.'[291] But we have already discussed the problem of the age of Tantrism and we have seen that whatever might have been the date of the written treatises on it, Tantrism goes as far back as the Indus period. The consideration of the date, therefore, does not prove that Tantrism in India was but a version of Taoism imported from China.

Apart from this consideration of the date, Needham has cited, mainly from the writings of Bhattacharya and Bagchi, certain further evidences pointing to the possible Chinese origin of Tantrism. Bhattacharya claimed that the principal centre of Buddhist Tantrism was in Assam. It was in Assam (Kamarupa), again, that a Sanskrit translation of *Tao Te Ching* was undertaken in the seventh century[292] A.D. Again, China (Mahacina) occupies a very important place in the Tantrika literatures. This evidence, originally adduced by Bagchi, may be quoted from his work.

A certain number of Tantrik practices styled *Cinacara* has been much discussed by scholars. The *Tara Tantra* adopted by both Hinduism and Buddhism says that the cult of *Cina Tara* came from the country of Mahacina. Vasistha, one of the greatest Brahmana sages, is said to have gone to the country of Mahacina to meet Buddha, who was to be found at that time neither in India nor in Tibet. Vasistha was initiated there by Buddha to the secret doctrines of *Cinacara* and subsequently came back to India to propagate them. In this *Cinacara*, Prof. Sylvian Levi finds distinct echo of the secret societies which existed in China.[293]

[288] *Ib.* ii 429. [289] *Ib.* ii 427. [290] *Ib.* ii 427.
[291] *Ib.* ii 428. [292] *Ib.* [293] ST i 45-6.

Bagchi went further to show the essential identity of the two goddesses Mahacinakrama Tara and Ekajata, which according to him, showed that the latter of the Hindu *Tantras* was really Chinese in origin.[294] Again, the *Sammoha Tantra* mentioned 'a lake called Cola on the western side of the Meru which was included in the *Cina-desa*.' This suggested to the author the connection of Tantrism with the 'pure Mongolian zone.'[295]

'There are ample evidence,' said Bagchi, 'to prove that the zone of heterodox *Tantras* went far beyond the natural limits of India.'[296] It is not necessary to quote all the details of these evidences, and it is certainly impossible to question their importance. But the basic question remains: What do all these evidences really prove? They imply foreign elements in the Tantra, argued Bagchi. According to Needham, some of these, in the context of the fundamental similarity between Taoism and Tantrism, suggest the possibility of Taoism having been originally exported from China, subsequently assuming the form of Tantrism in India. The importation of Tantrism to China, therefore, could have been, according to Needham, a case of *re-importation*.[297] The fact of Indian Buddhist Tantrism coming to China in the eighth century A.D., has been interpreted by him as follows:

> Possibly, therefore, Tantrism was another instance of foreigners amiably instructing Chinese in matters with which the Chinese were already quite familiar.[298]

In view of the extreme antiquity of Indian Tantrism, it is of course impossible to prove that it was merely Taoist in origin. Nevertheless, the facts and evidences mentioned by the scholars are significant. There had been foreign elements in the *Tantras*. But this could have been possible only because Tantrism already had the framework within which these foreign elements could be accommodated. In other words certain beliefs and practices were already current in China, Tibet and other places and these, in the course of time, got absorbed in Indian Tantrism. This could have been possible only on the basis of some fundamental affinity already existing between all these and Tantrism. And there will be no mystery about this fundamental affinity if we agree to look at these as ultimately rooted in the primitive agri-

294 *Ib*.
295 *Ib*. 46.
296 *Ib*.
297 SCC ii 428.
298 *Ib*.

cultural matriarchate. Similar is our comment on Needham's view on the relation between Tantrism and Taoism.

The point is that neither Taoism nor Tantrism was a thing-in-itself. Both must have had their roots in the concrete material conditions,—must have been 'directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men', as the Marxists would put it. Without a clear analysis of this material basis, the mere talk of one borrowing from the other remains mysterious. As Thomson,[299] referring to the theory that the Eleusinian Mysteries were borrowed from Egypt, has remarked:

> This evidence proves that the cult of Demeter had been subjected at one period to Egyptian influence; but the precise extent of that influence can only be determined after an investigation of the social origins of mystical religion as such.... *Religious ideas are borne by trade winds far afield, but they only take root in soils ready to receive them, and their subsequent growth is determined primarily by the conditions of their immediate environment. In order to assess the significance of the features common to the two cults, it is necessary to relate both to the general history of agriculture and to relate their points of divergence to the special history of the two areas.* It is only when that has been done that we shall be in a position to treat the question of diffusion as a separable factor.

We have emphasised a portion of the quotation above, because it could have been a verbatim comment on Needham's theory on the possible Taoist origin of Indian Tantrism. And yet Needham himself does not appear to have any great confidence in the diffusionist hypothesis. Referring to the parallel between the thoughts in *Kuan Tzu* (a Taoist book) and those of Thales of Miletus, he has observed:

> I am not disposed to believe that there can be any question of transmission of the ideas. *Similar minds working on similar problems would be expected to come to similar results.*[300]

This is certainly true. But why should we not extend its implications to the question of the relation between Taoism and Tantrism as well?

13. Manual Labour and Proto-Science

The most startling of all the points made by Needham concerns the political position of the Taoists. It acquires a special significance in view of the fact, as Needham himself has insisted, that their political position cannot be separated from their proto-scientific tendencies.

[299] AA 120-1. Italics added. [300] SCC ii 42. Italics added.

It is said that the Taoists walked outside the society. This might have been so. The reason, however, is that 'they were in complete opposition to the very structure of feudal society, and their withdrawal was part of their protest.'[301]

The Taoist criticism of the feudal lords and their ideological spokesmen—'the wise sages and the righteous scholars'—was scathing. It reminds us of the Lokayata and Sahajia criticism of the claims and pretensions of the ruling castes. Here are two examples:

The shameless becomes rich, and good talkers become high officials . . . Small robbers are put in prison, but great robbers become feudal lords, and there on the gates of the feudal lords will your 'righteous scholars' be found.[302]

Do not those who are vulgarly called wise prove to be but collectors for the great thieves? And do not those who are considered sages then prove to be but guardians in the interest of the great thieves? Here is one who steals a buckle (for his girdle)—he is put to death for it. Here is another who steals a State—he becomes its prince. And it is at the gates of the princes that we find benevolence and righteousness (most strongly) professed. Is not this stealing benevolence and righteousness, sageness and wisdom?[303]

With this bitter protest against feudalism, what was the alternative proposed by the Taoists?

They proposed nothing new, they did not look *forward,* and strictly speaking, therefore, they were not revolutionary; they looked *back*, and the type of society to which they wished to return can have been nothing other than primitive tribal collectivism.[304]

Wherefrom could the Taoists get the idea of this pre-class collectivism?

If it is hard to believe that the memory of this ancient feeling of social solidarity, prior to the development of classes, could have persisted sufficiently long to have inspired the Taoists, one may remember that groups following this way of life are likely to have persisted at the fringes of Chinese society far down into the feudal period. No doubt the 'barbarians,' against whom the feudal lords so frequently fought, followed it.[305]

Further,

it is possible to quote from Chinese writers of many ages who read back their observations of the customs of environing peoples into their own antiquity.[306]

Needham quoted a number of remarkable passages showing how strongly the memory of primitive communism survived

[301] *Ib.* ii 86. [302] *Ib.* ii 102. [303] *Ib.*
[304] *Ib.* ii 104. [305] *Ib.* [306] *Ib.* ii 104n.

in the tradition of the Taoists and how clearly their political inspiration was rooted in it. Here is an example:

The world was an undifferentiated unity, the pure collectivity had not been broken up and dispersed, the different sorts of people formed a oneness, and all creations flourished exceedingly.[307]

The Taoist writings mention certain legendary rebels, against whom the earliest legendary kings had to fight and whom they destroyed.[308] It is possible, suggested Needham, 'that we should see behind these legendary symbols the leaders of that pre-feudal class-differentiated society.'[309]

What is striking, further, is that these legendary names had obvious connections with the working people:[310] the inventor of metallurgy and metal weapons, the inventor of embankments and walls, the chief of the artisans, the copper worker,[311] etc. One of these names, Kung Kung, literally meant communal labour.[312]

This led Needham to argue an extremely significant point:

If the Taoists really held the political views which I am suggesting that they did hold, one would expect to find traces of some close connection between them and the working people. Such traces exist.[313]

In the practice of the two philosophers called Hsu Hsing and Chhen Hsiang (300 B.C.), 'we can dimly see traces of co-operative agricultural units reminiscent of the Digger Movement of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century.'[314] They are said to have belonged to the School of Agriculturists, 'but we can see that they must have been extremely close to the Taoists.'[315]

Another connection of the Taoists with manual work and technology is seen in a type of story which is so frequent that one may call them 'knack-passages.' Their general burden is that wonderful skills cannot be taught and transferred, but are attainable by minute concentration on the Tao running through natural objects of all kinds.[316]

Such knack-passages occur concerning the butcher, the musician, the cicada-catcher, boatmen, swimmers, sword-makers, bellstand-carvers, arrow-makers, wheelwrights, animal tamers and mathematicians.[317]

'In any case', Needham summed up, 'throughout the subsequent centuries material production and manual labour continued to be a trait of Taoist communities.'[318]

307 *Ib.* ii 107.
308 *Ib.* ii 115ff.
309 *Ib.* ii 119.
310 *Ib.* ii 117.
311 *Ib.* ii 115-7.
312 *Ib.* ii 117.
313 *Ib.* ii 120.
314 *Ib.*
315 *Ib.*
316 *Ib.*
317 *Ib.* ii 121.
318 *Ib.*

This connection of the Taoists with manual labour and material production is exceedingly important. It is here that we come across the clue to their scientific or proto-scientific world-outlook. Labour processes involve a sense of objective coercion—the material reality of the external world is brought to bear on the human consciousness when man is engaged in work on it. In other words, manual labour keeps human consciousness anchored to the concrete material world and does not allow it to drift to other-worldliness or idealistic fancies. It is only when, as the result of the process of social evolution, manual labour is despised,—looked at as a mark of degeneration and vulgarity, —human consciousness, i.e., the consciousness of the ruling class that withdraws itself from the direct responsibility of manual labour, also emancipates itself from its obligations to the concrete material world and acquires the delusion of omnipotence, flattering itself with the idea, as if it were the creator of the external world.[319] This is the idealistic outlook, and when the word consciousness is substituted by God or Spirit, the same is called spiritualism.

It is not difficult to see why science should become impossible on the basis of such a view. When the whole world is reduced to a mere product of consciousness,—of Mind, Spirit, or God—it cannot acquire any more status than a phantasmagoria, making it an idle preoccupation to be seriously interested in its laws and secrets. It is because of this that Buddhism, as a world-denying ascetic faith, when exported to China, became so much inimical to scientific speculations there.[320]

With the Taoists, however, it was different. Remaining true, as they always did, to material production and manual labour, they could also retain an instinctively materialistic outlook, on the basis of which alone it was possible to develop science or proto-science. As Needham put it, 'at bottom, the artisan and the Taoist stood together in the conviction that the Tao was in natural things and not something other-worldly and transcendent.'[321] Following is an excellent example of this instinctive materialism from the Taoist writings:

All the labour (of building) throughout the months and years is devoted to the handling of natural things. But people say that to be enslaved to natural things is not the right Tao. However, I believe that the right Tao lies exactly in being the servant of the things of Nature. If this were not so, the people would not know

[319] Engels. DN 328-9; Marx and Engels GI 19-20.
[320] Needham SCC ii. 396, 403. [321] *Ib.* ii 123.

the use of all simple everyday things. Even the Confucian scholars cannot depart from practical things for a single moment.[322]

This is instinctive materialism generated by the processes of manual labour. It was on the basis of this that the Taoists developed their scientific or proto-scientific outlook. Needham's concluding remarks in connection with democracy and science in ancient China deserve to be quoted at length:

... the birth of science requires the bridging of the gap between the scholar and the artisan. It is a point to which we shall return, but it must be mentioned here, for the Confucians were entirely on the side of the literate administrators, and lacked all sympathy with artisans and manual workers. The Taoists, on the other hand, were, as we have seen, in close contact with them (here is another parallel with the pre-Socratic Greek nature-philosophers). These attitudes run through all later Chinese history.... Other points of connection might be raised, but enough has been said to indicate that it was probably no coincidence that Taoism in its ancient form was connected both with the earliest Chinese science and technology, and with the ideals of ancient equalitarian pre-feudal Chinese society.[323]

This last point is probably in need of a little more clarification. What was it that established the connection between proto-science and the ideal of the primitive collective society of Taoism? The answer is to be found in the attitude to manual labour in the primitive collectivist society. Here are two remarkable Taoist evidences cited by Needham.

The compiler of the Bibliography in the *Chhien Han Shu* says of the followers of the Agriculture School that 'they could see no use for sage-kings. Desiring both ruler and subject to plough together in the fields, they overthrew the order of upper and lower classes.'[324]

(Anciently) the people had a constant nature, they wove themselves clothes and tilled the ground for food. This was what we call the Virtue of the Common Life. They were united, forming one single group; this was what we call Natural Liberty.[325]

In the terminology of the Marxists, the primitive society was yet to witness the divorce of theory from practice, of mental labour from manual labour; and it was in such a social organisation that the Taoists were seeking their inspiration.

But the ideology of the primitive society is magic. And Needham has repeatedly observed that the proto-science of the Taoists was also magical. As a matter of fact, Chinese Taoism so closely resembled Indian Tantrism in being predominantly magical. Again, Tantrism, too, as we shall see further on, represented the proto-scientific trend in the Indian philosophical heritage.

[322] *Ib.*
[323] *Ib.* ii. 131-2.
[324] *Ib.* ii 121.
[325] *Ib.* ii. 106.

If all these sound queer and baffling, the real reason is that the modern man is prone to misunderstand the real significance of primitive magic. There is no doubt that magic rests on ignorance. But ignorance is one thing while idealism or spiritualism quite another. In magic, as Frazer[326] pointed out,

> we may detect a germ of the modern notion of natural law or the view of nature as a series of events occurring in an invariable order without the intervention of personal agency.

Again:

> Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. . . . The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence.[327]

It is from this point of view that Frazer characterised magic as *next of kin to science*.[328]

Nevertheless, Frazer treated magic largely as a thing-in-itself. He has not gone into the question why magic, with all its primitiveness and ignorance, could remain so much akin to science? It is here that Needham's analysis of the subject comes to our help.

'Science and magic,' said Needham, 'are in their earliest stages indistinguishable.'[329] This is a point, according to him, the importance of which 'one cannot emphasise too much.'[330] Thus Taoism, which was basically magic,[331] was also proto-science.[332] But the question is, how was it so? How could magic and science be originally thus indistinguishable? If science be based on an instinctively materialistic outlook, and if magic be originally next of kin to science, magic too must have been originally based on an instinctive materialism. And there is no mystery about it, because this instinctive materialism is itself generated by the labour processes. Primitive society was yet to witness the degradation of the labour process; magic, its characteristic outlook, had to remain instinctively materialistic, and as such closely akin to science. It is from this point of view that we are to understand Needham's bold formulation: 'magic and science were originally united in a single *undifferentiated complex of manual operations*.'[333] With the disintegration of the pre-

[326] GB 10. [327] *Ib.* 49. [328] *Ib.* 50.
[329] SCC ii 34. [330] *Ib.* ii 83.
[331] *Ib.* ii 83ff., 132ff. [332] *Ib.* ii 68-9.
[333] *Ib.* ii 426. Italics added.

class society, manual operation was looked down; the primitive magic or proto-science gave way to religion and the idealistic outlook. Taoism, with its moorings for the primitive pre-class society,—in which 'the ruler and subject had to plough together in the fields,'—had naturally no place for other-worldliness in it. It was magic. But it was also proto-science. Later, though despised by the upper classes and their ideological spokesmen, it retained its connections with the working people.

How Needham argued these exceedingly important points is a question into the details of which we cannot enter here. We have, unfortunately, neither the scope to quote the remarkable Taoist passages cited and re-interpreted by him. What is really important for us is to draw those implications of his analysis that are specially helpful for our understanding of Tantrism.

We have tried to trace the sources of Tantrism to the manual operation of agriculture. In its initial stage, these manual operations were intensely characterised by magical beliefs and practices. However, with all the ignorant fantasies of savagery with which it was stuffed, the agricultural magic from which Tantrism arose, because of its connections with the manual operations, remained instinctively materialistic. The germs of this instinctive materialism became clear in the *dehavada* of Tantrism, which, as we have seen, followed directly from the theoretical aspects of the ancient agricultural magic. Later Tantrism, as surviving in the altered social atmosphere, passed into its opposite. That which was originally a form of instinctive materialism became a receptacle for spiritualistic ideas like *bhakti, puja, moksa* and what not. Nevertheless, the relics of the original materialism was never completely lost because Tantrism, even in the later times, retained its connections with the despised castes and toiling peoples. And if this was so, we may expect to see Tantrism closely associated with the scientific or proto-scientific trend of the cultural heritage of India.

13. The Proto-Scientific Trend

Observed Needham:

> Naturally Victorian scholars spoke of Tantrism with bated breath, but we may well question whether these ideas, which after all we cannot judge by the canons of a civilization which has had two thousand years of Pauline anti-sexuality, were not quite reasonably associated with the magical-scientific view of the world. I would remind the reader only of the great, though sometimes unsuspected, part which sexual symbolism

has played in the language of the alchemists. May it not have been that the very conception of chemical reaction arose by analogy from the congress of the human sexes?[334]

Again, referring to the exponents of Tantrism in China, he said,

. . . the most important Tantrist was the monk I-Hsing (672-717 A.D.), the greatest Chinese astronomer and mathematician of his time, and this fact alone should give us a pause, since it offers a clue to the possible significance of this form of Buddhism for all kinds of observational and experimental sciences. It would be surprising if there were no alchemical connections. . .[335]

As a matter of fact, it is in this field of alchemy that the contribution of the Tantrikas to Indian science was most notable. The subject was exhaustively treated by Ray in his *History of Hindu Chemistry*.

'Indian Alchemy,' observed Ray,[336] 'very largely derives its colour and flavour from it,' i.e., Tantrism. The Tantrika cult is 'a curious mixture of alchemical processes on the one hand, and grotesque and obscene and sometimes revolting rites on the other.'[337] The most important Tantrika text, from the point of view of alchemical knowledge, is *Rasaratnakara* of the eighth century A.D.[338] But there were many other texts like this. 'It is scarcely possible,' said Ray,[339] 'to submit an exhaustive list.' Ray himself used as his sources mainly the following: *Rasaratnakara*,[340] *Rasarnava*,[341] *Kakacandesvarimata Tantra*,[342] *Rasendracuramani*,[343] *Rasaprakasasudhakara*,[344] etc. He prepared a list of the more important texts like these along with the names of their authors and the list contains no less than two dozen names.[345] Some of the texts in their original form are lost, though preserved in Tibetan translation. Some of the names and contributions of the important alchemists are preserved in the writings of others.

There are indeed a great many names scattered throughout the mass of chemical and medical literatures, some of which have been handed down to posterity, sometimes on account of the important processes they invented and sometimes, again, because of the efficacy of the metallic preparations which they introduced.[346]

The universities of Nalanda, Udantapura and Vikramasila in Central India and Magadha became the important centres

334 *Ib.* ii 426.
335 *Ib.* ii 427.
336 Ray HHC i Intro. xxxv.
337 *Ib.* i Intro. xxxviii.
338 Ray (ed) HCAMI 311
339 Ray HHC ii Intro. xcvi.
340 *Ib.* ii 1.
341 *Ib.* ii 9.
342 *Ib.* ii 12.
343 *Ib.* ii 14.
344 *Ib.* ii 16.
345 *Ib.* ii Intro. xcvi.
346 *Ib.* ii Intro. xcv.

for the cultivation of Tantrism, 'with alchemy as an integral part of it., It is conjectured that from there it spread to South India and Tibet (Bhot).[347]

The development of Tantrika mysticism in South India has some special importance for us and we may discuss it briefly.

Like the Carya songs of early medieval Bengal, Tamil literature preserves for us a considerable body of poetical works attributed to the great South Indian Tantrists of the time. In Tamil they were called the *sittars* (Sanskrit *siddhas*, the perfect ones, i.e., the great adepts in Tantrism), a word that obviously corresponds to the Siddhacaryas of the Carya songs. We are indebted to Iyer for a short account of them.[348]

Of the eighteen *sittars* mentioned in these Tantrika works, one had the name Bogar in Tamil. A considerable number of medical and alchemical works are attributed to him. According to these sources, he was originally a Chinese who came to India in the third century A.D. To begin with, he spent some time in Patna and Gaya. These were areas under strong Buddhist influence then. However, Bogar's writings show hardly any influence of Buddhism.

He next moved to South India and got himself initiated in Tantrism by the *sittars* there. Eventually, he himself acquired the status of a *sittar* and by all means a foremost one. He not only wrote his treatises on alchemy and medicine; it is also believed that the South Indian *sittars* learnt a lot about these subjects from him.

> He is said to have visited Arabia and then returned to his country. It is further believed that some of his Tamil disciples accompanied him to China and after learning some mechanical arts returned to Tamil Nad.[349]

Bogar was not the only Chinese among the South Indian *sittars*. Iyer has mentioned another, called Pulipani in Tamil. It is said that he came to India along with Bogar and settled in Tamil Nad. Evidently he too worked his way up to the status of a *sittar* in a similar manner. A considerable number of works on magic, medicine and alchemy bear his name. These too are in Tamil, and, needless to add, are written from the Tantrika point of view.

Most of the works of the Tamil *sittars* still remain scattered over various manuscript libraries and monasteries of South

[347] *Ib.* ii Intro. xlix.
[348] Ray (ed.) HCAMI 125-6. [349] *Ib.* 126.

India. When properly edited and analysed, these will give us rich material for reconstructing the history of Indian science. We may have some idea of their importance as source-material from the following.

Reddy[350] has recently published a list of twenty-seven of these manuscripts along with short notes on their contents. Important data concerning Indian medicine, alchemy and chemistry are to be found in these notes. Reddy mentioned thirty-eight more manuscripts and told us that these abound in similar materials.

Thus the special interest of these works of the Tamil *sittars* is twofold. First, these indicate some kind of exchange of scientific or proto-scientific ideas and techniques between India and China. Of the eighteen South Indian *sittars* at least two were definitely Chinese. For, though the dates ascribed to them by the Tamil sources may not be beyond controversy, there is no ground to question their validity on the point that Bogar and Pulipani originally came from China. Secondly, on the evidence of these Tamil sources, this interchange of scientific knowledge took place through the medium of Tantrism. The natural presumption is that there was something inherent in Tantrism that favoured the growth of the scientific trend. Incidentally, the Tamil *sittars* were strongly opposed to the idealistic philosophy of Samkara[351] and Bogar, as we have just seen, was least influenced by Buddhism proper.

We have tried to indicate what it was in Tantrism that favoured the growth of the scientific trend. Readers interested in more details concerning the contribution of the Tantrikas to Indian medicine, alchemy and chemistry may look up Ray's book. It is not necessary for us to enter here into all the technicalities of the chemical processes invented by the Tantrikas. Instead of that we may remain confined to certain broader question of general theoretical interest.

It is true that the alchemical *Tantras*, too, followed the stereotyped pattern of the so-called Hindu or Buddhist *Tantras*. The theme is often presented in the form of a dialogue between Siva and Parvati. Again, sometimes a Buddha, a Tathagata or an Avalokitesvara is invoked as the source and fountain of all knowledge. Nevertheless, the artificiality of all these becomes evident from the distinct emphasis on experimental observation

350 *Ib.* 127. 351 *Ib.* 126.

which appears to be a persistent theme of these alchemical *Tantras*.

The Tantrikas did invent and use a large variety of actual laboratory instruments for their chemical experiments and they gave functional names to these, e.g. Dola Yantram, Svedani Yantram, Patana Yantram, Adhaspatana Yantram, Dheki Yantram, Valuka Yantram, Tiryakpatana Yantram, Vidyadhara Yantram, Dhupa Yantram and Kosthi Yantram. Interesting diagrams of these are to be found in the *History of Chemistry in Ancient and Medieval India*.[352]

But not merely the invention and the use of such instruments—the importance of experiments was theoretically formulated by the Tantrika alchemists. Said the *Rudrayamala Tantra*:[353]

> I have performed the aforementioned experiments with my own hands and have seen them with my own eyes. They are not recorded from mere hearsay or from the dictation of a teacher. These are being promulgated for the benefit of mankind.

Similarly, the *Rasendracintamani*[354] opened with the following declaration:

> I shall give publicity only to such processes as I have been able to verify by my own experiments.

In another place, the author of the same treatise declared:

> Those mercurial operations alone have found a place in my book, which I have been able to put to tests. Those who teach without being able to perform experiments labour in vain.[355]

Are not all these extremely remarkable in the land of *sruti* and *smriti*? But the theoretical interest of these alchemical *Tantras* is not exhausted merely by its emphasis on experimental observations. Consistent with this emphasis, we find in the texts a conscious acceptance of the materialistic outlook to serve as the theoretical foundation of this science or proto-science.

'What is it,' Ray[356] asked himself, 'that made the *Tantras* the repositories of chemical knowledge'? The answer, he rightly said, was already given by the Tantrikas themselves. Said the author of the *Rasarnava*:

> As it is used by the best devotees for the highest end, it is called *parada* (quick-silver).
> Begotten of my limbs, it is, O Goddess, equal to me.

352 *Ib*. Fig. 30A, B, D, E, G, etc.
353 *Ib*. 157.
354 Ray HHC ii Intro. lxiv.
355 *Ib*.
356 *Ib*. i Intro. xli.

> It is called *rasa* because it is the exudation of my body.
>
> It may be urged that the literal interpretation of these words is incorrect, the liberation in this life being explicable in another manner.
>
> This objection is not allowable. Liberation is declared in the six systems as subsequent to the death of the body, and upon this there can be no reliance, and consequently no activity to attain to it free from misgivings...
>
> Such liberation is not cognised in perception like an emblic fruit in hand.
>
> Therefore, a man should preserve that body by means of mercury and medicaments.[357]

Another text declared:

> Those who, without quitting their bodies have attained to new ones through the influence of Hara and Gauri (i.e. mercury and mica), are to be praised as *rasasiddhas* (alchemists).... The ascetic, therefore, who aspires to liberation in this life, should first make to himself a glorified body.[358]

The conception of liberation, here, is peculiarly physical. To the Tantrikas, liberation meant perfection and development of the body. As it was declared, 'having attained to mercurial bodies and therewith identified are liberated though alive'.[359] Thus, it is this conception of physical immortality that gave the Tantrikas the word for mercury (*parada*). According to them, mercurial preparations could make the body imperishable. To acquire such a state of the body was the highest ideal. Mercury, thus, was the giver (*da*) of the summum bonum (*para*), i.e. it was *parada*.

> The preservation of body, O Supreme Goddess, is obtained by mercury and by (the supression) of breath. Mercury, when swooned, cures diseases and when killed, restores life to the dead.[360]
>
> Some one may urge: If the creation of mercury by Hara and Gauri were proved, it might be allowed that the body could be made permanent; but how can that be proved? This objection is not allowable, inasmuch as that can be proved by eighteen modes of elaboration.[361]

This conception of physical immortality and its connection with the alchemy of the Tantrikas is, again, strongly reminiscent of ancient Taoism. The Taoists, as Needham showed,[362] were

357 *Ib.* 358 *Ib* ii 58.

359 Quoted *SDS* (Cowell) 139. Cf. Ray HCAMI 132: 'By partaking of this elixir (or the sublimate) the devotee acquires a body not liable to decay.' Cf. *SDS* (Cowell) 137: 'Mercury is called *parada*, because it is a means of conveyance beyond the series of transmigratory states'.

360 Ray HHC i Intro. xlii-ii.

361 *Ib.* i Intro. xliii.

362 SCC ii. 139.

emphasising the importance of certain techniques like the respiratory technique (*pranayama*), the gymnastic technique (*asana*), the sexual technique (*maithuna*), the alchemical and pharmaceutical techniques (*rasayana*)—and all these for the purpose of attaining a state of *material immortality*. This conception of material immortality, he added, was 'of incalculable importance to science' because it 'stimulated the development of the technique of alchemy.'[363] We have just seen that precisely the same thing was said of Tantrism by our Tantrikas themselves: unlike the followers of the idealistic systems of Indian philosophy who belittled the importance of the body and dreamt of the liberation of the soul, the Tantrikas, with their supreme emphasis on the material human body (*dehavada*), conceived liberation only in terms of the development and culture of the body (*kaya sadhana*). It is no wonder, therefore, that they should have been so much concerned with concrete material measures that could ensure the development and the preservation of the body itself. This explains their contribution to alchemy and medicine. In short, the proto-materialism of the Tantrikas was the clue to their proto-scientific tendencies.[364]

As is only to be expected, this proto-materialism was archaic and instinctive; it was still inextricably mixed up with ritual practices that formed part of the extremely backward technology. It remains for us to argue in the next chapter how in original Sankhya this archaic materialism implicit in the Tantra acquired a self-conscious philosophical form and thus represented the strongest opposition to the most outstanding school of the idealistic philosophy in this country, namely the Vedanta.

363 *Ib.*

364 Madhava *SDS* (Cowell) 136-44 gives us a description of this philosophical basis of the Mercurial System; however, because he did not emphasise the essential proto-materialism of this philosophy and did not connect it with the *deha-vada* and the *kaya-sadhana* of the Tantrikas, his account remains somewhat confusing and sketchy.

CHAPTER SIX

SANKHYA

FROM PROTO-MATERIALISM TO MATERIALISM

Much of Sankhya literature appears to have been lost, and there seems to be no continuity of tradition from ancient times up to the age of the commentators. In such systematic works as we have, one seems to have a hazy view of a grand system of speculative metaphysics. There is so much that is clothed in a poetic or mystic garb on which commentators do not help us much but which are suggestive enough to tempt us to construct the system anew. The interpretation of all ancient systems requires a constructive effort; but while in the case of some systems where we have a large volume of literature and a continuity of tradition, the construction is mainly of the nature of translation of ideas into modern concepts, here in Sankhya the construction at many places involves supplying of missing links from one's imagination. It is risky work, but unless one does it one cannot be said to understand Sankhya as a philosophy. It is a task that one is obliged to undertake. It is a fascinating task because Sankhya is a bold constructive philosophy.

KRISHNACANDRA BHATTACHARYYA[1]

'We are reminded of the Sankhya philosophy by the familiar drum-beats of the Durga Puja or of the worship of Kali or of Jagaddhatri.' Bankimcandra Chattopadhyaya,[2] the eminent novelist and thinker of the nineteenth century Bengal made this extraordinary observation. We have already discussed the cults of Durga and of the other Mother Goddesses and have seen these to be offshoots of ancient Tantrism. But what is there in Tantrism to remind us of the Sankhya philosophy? Bankimcandra answered that the Sankhya principles of *purusa* and *prakriti* laid the basis for Tantrism.

[1] SP 127. [2] *BR* (B) ii. 222.

I. Tantra and Sankhya

That the fundamental theoretical concepts of Tantrism are strikingly similar to—and, in fact, are identical with—those of the Sankhya system cannot be questioned. These are the concepts of *prakriti* and *purusa,* with a decisive emphasis on the former. This naturally raises the question of the relationship between Sankhya and Tantra. The usual nineteenth-century explanation, as accepted by Bankimcandra, is that Tantrism borrowed its theoretical basis from the Sankhya philosophy. Thus, for example, in his article on 'Hinduism' in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics,* Crooke,[3] referring to Tantrism, commented,

> it has been supplied with a philosophical justification, being a popularised version of the Sankhya principle of the union of the soul of the universe (*purusa*) with the primordial essense (*prakriti*).

We are going to argue that the rendering of *purusa* as the soul of the universe, however popular it may be, is, in all probability, alien to the spirit of original Sankhya. More serious, however, is the error of the general hypothesis itself, namely, that Tantrism borrowed its theoretical basis from the Sankhya system. Even a mere chronological consideration makes the hypothesis *prima facie* doubtful. Tantrism, we have already seen, is so ancient that its origin can be traced as far back as the Indus period and it would be illogical to argue that the supreme importance of *prakriti* was originally extrinsic to it.

Thus, if the explanation of the similarity between Tantra and Sankhya on the usually accepted lines fails to satisfy us, may we not be justified in reversing the hypothesis, viz. that the Sankhya system may turn out to be a more explicit philosophical re-statement of the theoretical position implicit in Tantrism?

By way of what is called *vriddha-sammati* (the sanction of the elders) in our traditional philosophical writings, however, it may be pointed out at the very beginning that the genuine Indian philosophical tradition is not without any distinct hint as to the plausibility of this hypothesis. Samkara,[4] for example, told us in so many words that the Sankhya system of Kapila 'is called Tantra' (*trantrakhya*). Referring to the alleged authenticity of Sankhya, he said, 'such *smritis* are the one called Tantra which was composed by a *risi* and is accepted by authoritative persons.'

[3] ERE vi. 706. Cf. Dasgupta HIP i. 71.

[4] On *Br. Su.* ii. 1.1.

This may be understood along with the facts that in the same context he characterised the Sankhya philosophy as the 'Tantra of Kapila' (*Kapilasya tantra*),[5] while in another place he referred to the Sankhya philosophers as *tantrantariah*.[6] Of course, Thibaut was not inclined to attach any technical meaning to the use of the word *tantra* in the latter two cases. He rendered '*Kapilasya tantra*' as the 'system of Kapila'[7] and *tantrantariah* as the 'followers of another doctrine.'[8] But the etymology of the word *tantra* does not give us the sense of *system* or *doctrine*. The word commonly used by Samkara for doctrine or system is *vada* and, if Thibaut's translation be correct, it must be viewed as an extremely remarkable fact that Samkara used the word *tantra only in the context of Sankhya, i.e., never in the context of any other system*. Besides, Thibaut himself found it impermissible to take the first of the above-mentioned use of the word *tantra* in the sense of doctrine or system. He had to render *tantrakhya* as 'the one called Tantra.'[9]

But what did Samkara really mean by the word *tantra* in this case? The usual interpretation[10] is that he was possibly referring here to an ancient treatise on Sankhya, the *Sasti Tantra*, which is lost to us. But there are difficulties in accepting such an interpretation. There is nothing in the writing of Samkara himself to justify it. It is not understandable why, if his real intention was to refer to a definite treatise, he failed to call it by its proper name. Is it possible that he used the word *tantra* merely to indicate the text *Sasti Tantra*? That hardly seems plausible, for the word *tantra* must have had its distinct sense in his times. Secondly, it is extremely doubtful, if not manifestly absurd, to imagine that Samkara was referring here to any definite treatise at all. We have rather the impression that Samkara was using the word *tantra* in a general sense to cover a class of *smritis*, i.e., treatises though not scriptural yet traceable to authoritative persons. Further, the author of the *Sankhya Karika*[11] himself used the word *tantra* to mean the Sankhya doctrine, a circumstance to be understood in the context of the fact that no ancient exponent of any school of Indian philosophy except the Tantrikas was known to use the word *tantra* to refer to his own system. Besides, the name *Sasti Tantra* is itself sug-

5 *Ib.*
6 *Ib.* ii. 4. 9.
7 SBE xxxiv. 295.
8 *Ib.* xxxviii. 86.
9 *Ib.* xxxiv. 291.
10 Vedantabagish *SB* (B) ii.2n.
11 70. For difference in interpretation of *bahudha kritam tantram*, see Dasgupta HIP i. 211 and Colebrooke SK 158-9.

gestive because such names are typical of the Tantrika texts. Interestingly, we know of another text on *Sankhya Yoga* called *Patanjala Tantra*,[12] which contains references to alchemical matters, too.

Such repeated use of the word *tantra* in connection with Sankhya could not be just accidental. We shall presently see that Gunaratna mentioned another extinct text on Sankhya, the *Atreya Tantra*.

But more important than all these is a significant circumstantial evidence which leads us to presume that Samkara represented the true spirit of the *Brahma Sutra* in calling Sankhya or Kapila's system by the name Tantra in the distinctly technical, i.e., in the Tantrika sense. A considerable portion of the *Brahma Sutra* was designed to refute the philosophical and theological claims opposed to the standpoint of the Vedanta. Apparently, the author was anxious to refute those of the rival systems in particular that exercised the strongest influence in his times. We have already seen that Tantrism, from a remote antiquity, enjoyed wide popularity and influence; in fact, it represented the strongest opposition to the Vedic standpoint. Under these circumstances, it was natural for the author of the *Brahma Sutra* to refute Tantrism. Strangely, however, we do not come across in this text any single aphorism meant directly to refute Tantrism. This omission can be explained only on the assumption that the author of the *Sutras*, by refuting the Sankhya system elaborately, considered a separate refutation of Tantrism unnecessary, possibly because, during his times, the difference between the fundamentals of the two did not acquire any great significance.

For the moment what particularly interests us is that if this hypothesis be true, that is, if the Sankhya philosophy were in the earlier times an explicit philosophical re-statement of the fundamental theoretical position implicit in Tantrism and, if further, as we have already tried to argue, the term Lokayata originally stood for the beliefs and practices broadly referred to as Tantrism, then original Sankhya may be viewed as the most important development of the Lokayata tradition in Indian philosophy. Silamka, the Jaina commentator, was justified in denying any basic difference between Sankhya and Lokayata. Sankara, too, made the Sankhya philosophers quote the authority of the Lokayatikas.

[12] Dasgupta HIP i. 235.

All these mean that original Sankhya was a form of uncompromising atheism and materialism. In fact, the genuinely old Indian philosophical tradition viewed it thus. It was persistently called *nirisvara pradhana karana vada,* the godless doctrine of primordial matter. Further, it must have originally been fundamentally opposed to the orthodox or Vedic tradition which culminated in the idealistic outlook of the *Upanisads,* a point which the genuine representatives of the really orthodox tradition like Samkara and others have vigorously tried to establish.

Jacobi held the view that Sankhya was originally the development of a materialistic philosophy current in the country from very ancient times, a view which Radhakrishnan has tried to reject. Jacobi's attempt, said Radhakrishnan,

> to regard the Sankhya as the development of an early materialist school has little to support it. By its insistence on the absolute reality and independence of the spirit, the Sankhya set itself against all materialist views of mental phenomena. We do not come across any stage of the development of the Sankhya at which it can be identified with materialism.[13]

Radhakrishnan appears to be unduely influenced by the later writers on the Sankhya, who no longer represented the original spirit of the system. As a matter of fact, as we shall see later, this materialistic outlook of original Sankhya gave it a unique importance in the history of Indian philosophy. It was because of this that the Sankhya system could provide our philosophical tradition with the fundamental ideas of positive science. The most important of these are a theory of matter, a theory of causality, a theory of knowledge and a theory of evolutionary process. Referring to the last, Seal[14] observed:

> The Sankhya system possesses a unique interest in the history of thought as embodying the earliest clear and comprehensive account of the process of cosmic evolution, viewed not as a mere metaphysical speculation but as a positive principle based on the conservation, the transformation, and the dissipation of energy.

Finding such ideas in an ancient system like the Sankhya may appear to be somewhat far-fetched. But it is not so. Even if original Sankhya did not express all these ideas in their fully developed form, the potentialities of these were in it and this could be possible because of its firm basis in the materialistic outlook.

Nevertheless, persistent efforts were made to bring this originally heterodox system under the folds of orthodoxy and all

[13] IP ii. 251. [14] PSAH 2.

sorts of arguments were invented to make an idealistic and spiritualistic philosophy of it. This has naturally resulted in considerable confusion in modern interpretations of the Sankhya philosophy. At the initial stage of our study, therefore, we are confronted with a special problem: How are we to gain a clear idea of the original Sankhya?

2. Problem of Original Sankhya

The widespread influence which Sankhya philosophy enjoyed in this country can be judged from the circumstances that since the first century B.C., as Garbe[15] said,

> the whole of Indian literature, so far as it touches philosophical thought, beginning with the *Mahabharata* and the Law Book of Manu, specially the literature of mythological and legendary *Puranas,* has been saturated with the doctrines of the Sankhya.

Even Samkara,[16] perhaps the greatest opponent of the Sankhya, had repeatedly to admit, however grudgingly it might have been, that the Sankhya system was supported by many weighty arguments and had the partial sanction of some eminently wise men. It is surprising, therefore, that in spite of this, the genuinely authentic materials on original Sankhya are scanty and even those that are available are often highly deceptive.

Tradition attributes the origin of this system to Kapila, but makes the case confounding by also attributing a wide variety of conflicting myths to Kapila himself.[17] As we shall see, the *Mahabharata* evidence makes us wonder whether this person was a male or a female. Even the name Sankhya is quite a mystery, despite various efforts to give it a meaning.[18]

As for the original texts directly devoted to an exposition of this philosophy, we are, strictly speaking, left with only two. These are the *Sankhya Karika* and a certain *Sankhya Sutra*. The first is extremely short, consisting only of seventy-two couplets. The second one is quite late and largely spurious.

The authorship of the *Sankhya Sutras* is ascribed to Kapila himself. It imitates a recognised old style in being a bundle of cryptic aphorisms. But in fact, it is the work of an unknown and definitely medieval author. According to Garbe,[19] 'it is highly

[15] ERE xi. 189. [16] On *Br. Su.* ii. 1. 12. ii. 2. 17.
[17] Colebrooke SK 157, Malasekera DPPN i. 513-5.
[18] Belvalkar & Ranade HIP ii. 412. Gunaratna suggested that the name could have been शांख्य presumably derived from शंख meaning conch shell *TRD* 22. [19] SPB pref. ix.

probable that the *Sutras* themselves are to be referred to a date as late as about 1400 A.D.' Dasgupta[20] wanted to push their date five hundred years back. But he has not given us any definite reasons for this. On the other hand, the basic fact remains that the *Sankhya Sutra* has not been referred to by any writer before the fifteenth century A.D. Madhavacarya,[21] in his account of Sankhya, quoted only the *Karika*. Even Gunaratna,[22] though he spoke of a number of treatises on early Sankhya, was evidently unaware of the *Sutras*.

Besides, how little we can rely on these *Sutras* as an authentic source-book of original Sankhya, is evidenced by the fact that they represent a persistent effort to obliterate all distinctions between the Sankhya and the Vedanta. As Garbe[23] said:

> Even in the *Sankya Sutras* themselves.... the Sankhya doctrine no longer appears in its original unadulterated form; for they seek to explain away the points of discrepancy between themselves on the one hand and the teachings of the Upanisads and the Vedanta on the other. In particular, the author of the *Sutras* is at great pains to furnish proof of the utterly impossible thesis that the teachings of the Sankhya system are not in irreconcilable contradiction with the doctrine of personal God, with the doctrine of the all-embracing unity of Brahman, with the doctrine of the nature of Brahman as bliss (*ananda*), and with the doctrine of the attainment of the highest aim in the heavenly world.

The aphorisms referred to by Garbe as evidences of this absurdity are indeed interesting.[24] And here are his concluding remarks as to the difference between original Sankhya and the standpoint of the *Sankhya Sutra*:

> Indeed the Sankhya *Sutras* show clearly recognisable results of Vedantic influence in many places: most plainly perhaps at iv. 3, which is a word-for-word repetition of the Vedanta *Sutra* iv. 1. 1., and at v.116, where the Vedantic technical term *brahmarupata* is used instead of the proper Sankhya expression.

Compared to this, the *Sankhya Karika* attributed to Isvarakrisna is older. According to Garbe,[25] it can be placed possibly in the fifth century A.D., while according to Dasgupta,[26] 200 A.D. In spite of its comparatively greater antiquity, however, some of the modern scholars have offered definite historical grounds against the plausibility of discovering original Sankhya in the *Karika*:

[20] HIP i. 212.
[21] *SDS* (Cowell) 221-30.
[22] *TRD* 99.
[23] SPB pref. xi.
[24] SS i. 95; i. 154; v. 64; v. 68; v. 110; vi. 51; vi. 58; vi. 59.
[25] ERE xi. 189.
[26] HIL i. 212.

The fact that Caraka (78 A.D.) does not refer to the Sankhya as described by Isvarakrisna and referred to in other parts of the *Mahabharata* is a definite proof that Isvarakrisna's Sankhya is a later modification, which was either non-existent in Caraka's time or was not regarded as an authoritative old Sankhya view. Wassilief says quoting Tibetan sources that Vindhyavasin altered the Sankhya according to his own views. Takakusu thinks that Vindhyavasin was a title of Isvarakrisna.[27]

Apart from such historical considerations, a logical analysis of the text reveals a very clear tendency to incorporate into the Sankhya system certain philosophical views that are really Vedantic in origin, though not possibly in as gross a manner as was done by the author of the *Sankhya Sutra*. In any case, it would be wrong under these circumstances to rely uncritically on the *Karika* for an idea of original Sankhya.

Moreover, the *Sankhya Sutra* is but a collection of half sentences and the *Sankhya Karika* only a bundle of 'technical memorial verses.' It is necessary, in order to understand these, to depend upon the commentators. Bhattacharyya[28] regretted that 'there seems to be no continuity of tradition from ancient times up to the age of the commentators.' But the situation is worse than that. For, really speaking, we do not come across the writings of any commentator on either of these two texts who can be called a strict follower of the Sankhya. Apart from Raja, whose writings are lost to us,[29] the best known commentators on the *Karika* were Gaudapada and Vacaspati Misra. There is no definite ground to deny that this Gaudapada was the same person as the Vedanta philosopher famous for his commentary on the *Mandukya Upanisad*. Colebrooke[30] took him to be the same philosopher. At least, his commentary on the *Karika* shows a pronounced Vedantic bias. Again, Vacaspati Misra, a medieval philosopher belonging to the Nyaya School, was famous for his theism; he deliberately criticised the atheism of original Sankhya and wanted to convert it into a kind of theistic philosophy.

The first to comment on the *Sankhya Sutra* was Aniruddha, a pronouncedly Vedantic philosopher belonging to the fifteenth century A.D. He was followed by Vijnana Bhiksu (16th century A.D.) whose commentary *Pravacana Bhasya*, is probably the most well known work on the system, as well known in fact as his clearly artificial effort to harmonise the Sankhya with the Vedanta.

27 *Ib*. i. 218.
28 SP 127.
29 Dasgupta HIP i. 212 n.
30 SK pref. vi.

> In still larger measure (i.e. higher than in the *Sankhya Sutra*) do Vedantic influences manifest themselves in Vijnana Bhiksu's commentary on the *Sutras*, . . . In order to bridge over the chasm between the Sankhya system and his own theism (which he is pleased to style Vedantic), Vijnana Bhiksu resorts to the strangest means to do away with one of the fundamental doctrines of the genuine Sankhya, which is the denial of God.[31]

But more absurd than this, as Garbe[32] himself noted, is his effort to reconcile the Vedantic doctrine of the unreality of the world (*maya*) with the Sankhya doctrine of the fundamental reality of matter (*prakriti* or *pradhana*, also called *maya* in Sankhya, but in the definitely opposite sense).

There are a few other late medieval works on the Sankhya. But if the most outstanding commentaries on the extant treatises of the system and, what is worse, if these treatises themselves cannot be relied upon uncritically for an unbiased idea of original Sankhya, the importance of such late medieval works for the purpose is still less.

3. Sources of Original Sankhya

There were other and older works on the Sankhya. These are lost to us. The most important of these was perhaps a certain *Sasti Tantra* referred to at the end of the *Karika*:

> The subjects treated here in seventy couplets represent the entire (Sankhya) system, as is found in the *Sasti Tantra*, but exclusive of the anecdotal and polemical portions (of the *Sasti Tantra*).[33]

Colebrooke[34] thought that this was not a reference to any particular treatise on the Sankhya system; he translated the word *sastitantra* as 'comprising sixty topics.' But this is improbable. It is not possible to prepare a list of sixty topics as forming the essence of the Sankhya system, without being as ingenious as the *Raja Vartika* quoted in Vacaspati Misra's[35] commentary on the *Karika*. Even the *Karika*[36] mentioned a list of only twenty-five categories and the authoritative orthodox tradition, as evidenced by the *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*,[37] always remembered Sankhya as the doctrine of twenty-five topics. Besides, other writers, referred to the *Sasti Tantra* as an individual text. Thus, for example, we find a summary of it in the *Ahirbudhnya Samhita*,[38]

31 Garbe SPB pref. xii.
32 *Ib.* pref. xiii.
33 72. Like this, most of the *Karika*-passages quoted in this chapter are based on Colebrooke's translation.
34 SK 160.
35 *Ib.*
36 3.
37 *SDS* (Cowell) 223.
38 Dasgupta HIP i. 220.

whatever might have been the merit of this summary. Gunaratna gave a slightly altered name of the text, a circumstance that led Dasgupta[39] to conjecture that it might have been a reference to a revised edition of the *Sasti Tantra*.

Gunaratna[40] himself mentioned two other authoritative works on the Sankhya, the *Mathara Bhasya* and the *Atreya Tantra*. Nothing at all is known of the former and nothing definite of the latter, though Dasgupta[41] thought that the *Atreya Tantra* could have been 'the same as Caraka's treatment of the Sankhya.' His argument is that in the ancient medical treatise attributed to Caraka we come across some version of the Sankhya and the sage Atri is said to be the speaker in Caraka's work. The name *Atreya Tantra*, therefore, could have been derived from the name of this sage.

However, the more significant fact is that the *Caraka Samhita* is older than the *Sankhya Karika* and the treatments of the Sankhya in the two texts are substantially different. This led Dasgupta[42] to think that 'the account of the Sankhya given by Caraka represents probably an earlier school.' Gunaratna,[43] too, spoke of two distinct schools of the Sankhya, the Maulikya Sankhya and the Uttara Sankhya, literally the original Sankhya and the later Sankhya. Dasgupta[44] argued that the former could have been the same as Caraka's version of the Sankhya philosophy. Further, in the *Mahabharata* we come across certain passages in which the Sankhya doctrines were imparted to Janaka, king of Mithila and, according to Dasgupta,[45] this exposition of Sankhya essentially agreed with Caraka's version of it, a circumstance that lends added support to his thesis concerning Caraka's treatment of the Sankhya.

Whether Caraka's version of the Sankhya was actually the same as original Sankhya may still be an open question. What is evident, however, is that though Isvarakrisna's *Karika* happens to be the oldest available work on this system, we cannot uncritically rely on it for our knowledge of original Sankhya. The fact is that the Sankhya is extremely old and modifications have been continually introduced into it from very early times. In the *Mahabharata*,[46] the Sankhya and the Yoga were described as two eternal systems (*sanatane dve*) and this like all the

39 *Ib.* i. 220-1.
40 *TRD* 99.
41 HIP i. 213.
42 *Ib.* i. 212.
43 *TRD* 99.
44 HIP i. 217.
45 *Ib.* i. 216.
46 Garbe ACOPVMCSS Intro. xxi.

Vedas. Kautilya[47] mentioned only three systems, namely, the Sankhya, Yoga and the Lokayata. On the basis of evidences like these, Garbe[48] asserted that 'Sankhya is the title of the oldest system of Indian philosophy.' Along with others[49] he tried to prove that the Sankhya was pre-Buddhistic—as a matter of fact the system from which Buddhism arose. The name of Buddha's birth-place Kapilavastu could have been derived from that of Kapila.[50] Sastri fully subscribed to this view. He observed:

> Asvaghosa practically told us in so many words that the Buddhistic doctrines arose out of the Sankhya system. Both the preceptors of the Buddha, viz. Adara Kalama and Uddaka (Ramaputta) were subscribers to the Sankhya views.[51]

All these indicate the pre-Buddhistic origin of the Sankhya philosophy. Its antiquity is further evidenced by the fact that the name Sankhya as well as the terminologies peculiar to it are to be found in certain *Upanisads*, particularly the *Katha*, the *Maitri*, the *Svetasvatara* and the *Prasna*, though all these were comparatively younger among the *Upanisads*. This led a number of modern scholars to speculate on the rudiments of the Sankhya system in the Upanisadic literatures. But we may begin with an analysis of the circumstance which makes this possibility extremely remote.

4. Brahma Sutra and Sankhya

It is strange that the modern scholars who have speculated on the original Sankhya have so far largely ignored a very important source of our knowledge of it. It is the *Brahma Sutra* or the *Vedanta Sutra* ascribed to Badarayana.

The *Brahma Sutra* represents the first effort at a systematisation of the philosophy of the *Upanisads*. It consists of 555 *sutras* or aphoristic sentences (and often mere detached words in lieu of sentences), arranged in four chapters, having four sections in each.

According to Dasgupta,[52] these *sutras*, in their present form, were possibly 'written in the second century B.C.' But Thibaut[53] claimed that these were 'preceded by a long series of preparatory literary efforts of which they merely represent the highly condensed outcome.' If both the scholars are correct, this effort at

[47] *A* i. 1. See IA xlvii. 102. [48] ERE xi. 189.
[49] Thomas LB 193. [50] Garbe ACOPVMCSS intro. xx-xxi.
[51] *BD* (B) 37. [52] HIP i. 418.
[53] SBE xxxiv. intro. xii.

a systematic formulation of the Upanisadic philosophy must have been very ancient. Some of the writers[54] have gone so far as to claim that the *Brahma Sutra* could have been pre-Buddhistic. This would appear to be an exaggerated claim, unless of course we agree to look at a particular portion of it, called the *tarka-pada,* as a later addition to the original *Sutras* or, unless it is argued that all the traditional commentators thoroughly misunderstood it, for they are unanimous that this portion contains an explicit refutation of the Vijnana Vada school of Buddhistic philosophy, which was much later than the Buddha himself.

But the fact is that we cannot doubt at least the *basic contentions of the major commentators* of the text. If we do so, the *Sutras* will become merely a meaningless mass of words for us: It is here, as Thibaut has shown, that the *Brahma Sutras* differed from the other *Sutra* works, as the grammatical *Sutras*. It is possible to understand at least a considerable part of the other *Sutra*-works without depending on a commentary. But not so with the *Brahma Sutra.*

> There scarcely one single *sutra* is intelligible without a commentary. The most essential words are habitually dispensed with; nothing is, for instance, more common than the simple omission of the subject or predicate of a sentence. And when here and there a *Sutra* occurs whose words construe without anything having to be supplied, the phraseology is so eminently vague and obscure that without the help derived from a commentary we should be unable to make out to what subject a *Sutra* refers.[55]

This point is important. The philosophical position of the *Brahma Sutra* can be understood only by depending on the major commentators on it. The earliest and ablest of the commentators was Samkara, though the time-gap between the *Brahma Sutra* and Samkara was considerable. Samkara belonged to the eight century A.D.[56] Yet, as Gough[57] pointed out, there are reasons to believe that the Vedanta views came down to him by an unbroken series of teachers intervening between him and the author of the *Brahma Sutra.*

The other major commentator on the text was Ramanuja. He belonged to the eleventh century A.D.[58] Yet he, too, had 'an old and weighty tradition' behind him.[59] It will be argued that his differences with Samkara were considerable. Nevertheless,

[54] Vireswarananda BS intro. viii ff.
[55] SBE xxxiv. intro. xiii-xiv.
[56] IA xi. 174 ff; JBBRAS xvi. 190; xviii. 88, 203 etc.
[57] PU 239 ff. [58] ERE x. 572. [59] SBE xxxiv. intro. xvii.

we can depend upon both Samkara and Ramanuja for understanding the basic philosophical position of the *Brahma Sutra*. The differences between them were, after all, only differences within the broader structure of some general agreement.

It will therefore not be a valid argument to claim that a certain philosophical position cannot be attributed to the *Brahma Sutra* itself because it is to be found only in the writings of the commentators and not explicitly stated in the *sutras* themselves. In spite of the time gap between the *sutras* and the commentaries and, in spite of the differences between the major commentators[60] it is indeed possible for us to know a good deal about the real philosophical standpoint of the *Brahma Sutra* from them, particularly from Samkara.

What interests us most in the present context is that the author of the *Brahma Sutra* took *the greatest care to refute the Sankhya philosophy and in fact looked upon it as the most important challenge to the Vedanta system.* Thus the view refuted in the *Brahma Sutra* as the Sankhya system may give us real indications as to the nature of original Sankhya. It may be objected that the Sankhya as refuted in the *Brahma Sutra* is to a great extent the same as expounded in the *Karika*. How can we, then, doubt the latter and depend upon the former for an idea of original Sankhya?

There is some weight in this objection, at least as far as Samkara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* is concerned. For, the version of the Sankhya as refuted here was to a large extent drawn from the *Karika*. Still there is a distinct advantage in depending on Samkara. The author of the *Karika* wanted to graft upon the Sankhya system certain elements of idealistic thought, evidently borrowed from the Vedantic circle, and Samkara's writings are particularly helpful in exposing the internal inconsistencies thus created. That is, being a highly conscious idealist philosopher himself, Samkara could clearly see that the Vedantic elements (particularly, the Vedantic concept of *purusa* as Self or Consciousness) could be introduced into the Sankhya system only at the cost of internal consistency.

It would therefore not be a methodological error to suggest that we should gather our basic idea about original Sankhya from the refutation of it in the *Brahma Sutra* and then return

[60] I exclude such later commentators who have interpreted the *Br. Su.* according to all sorts of theological and philosophical viewpoints, including even the Sakta and the Sankhya views.

to examine such sources as the *Mahabharatha,* the *Caraka Samhita,* the younger *Upanisads* and even the *Sankhya Karika* itself and find out what really we can learn about original Sankhya from these. To doubt this procedure we have to imagine either that Badarayana was fighting an imaginary philosophy and yet called it Sankhya or that his major commentators thoroughly misunderstood him. Obviously enough, both the possibilities are preposterous.

5. Idealism Versus Materialism

It is important, first of all, to remember that there is nothing arbitrary about Badarayana's refutation of the Sankhya. It was only a logical necessity.

The Sankhya philosophy, as understood by the *Brahma Sutra,* is called *pradhana vada* or *pradhana karana vada,* i.e., 'the doctrine of *pradhana*' or 'the doctrine of *pradhana* being the first cause, the ultimate reality'. *Pradhana* being the Sankhya synonym for *prakriti,* this description of the philosophy makes the position of the *purusa* evidently anomalous. However, this is a point which we shall take up later. For the present, there is no doubt that the principle of *pradhana* meant only the primeval matter, the non-intelligent or non-sentient first cause. In contrast, the Vedanta philosophy was *Brahma vada* or *Brahma karana vada,* that is the doctrine according to which Brahman is the first cause, the ultimate reality. Whatever might have been the points on which Ramanuja differed from Samkara in interpreting the nature of the Brahman, there is no doubt that this Brahman was a principle of consciousness for all the Vedantists. Thus the controversy between the *Brahma karana vada* of the *Brahma Sutra* and the *pradhana karana vada* of the Sankhya was simply a controversy between idealism and materialism. In the terminology of Indian philosophy, it was a conflict between *cetana karana vada* and *acetana karana vada*—that is, between the doctrines of the first cause as a principle of consciousness and of unconscious matter. In defence of his own idealistic position, it was thus necessary for Badarayana to refute the materialism of the Sankhya. Judging from his zeal to single out the Sankhya philosophers as the foremost of his opponents, we can easily see how deep was the influence of materialistic thinking in his days and how old was the controversy between materialism and idealism in this country.

We may look at the planning of the *Brahma Sutra* to see the importance attached by its author to the refutation of Sankhya materialism. After explaining in the first four *sutras* certain points about the nature of Brahman and the Vedanta texts,—viz. the prerequisites of the enquiry into Brahman, that Brahman is the cause, etc., of the world, that Brahman is the source of the *Vedas* and that Brahman is uniformly the topic discussed in all the Vedanta texts—the author hastened to argue in the next seven *sutras* that this Brahman was an intelligent principle and must not be confused with the non-intelligent *pradhana* of the Sankhya.

But these are not the only *sutras* in which Badarayana tried to refute the materialistic standpoint of the Sankhya. A good deal of care was taken in the *Brahma Sutra* to refute the claims of the rival schools; but none of these received even half the attention given to the Sankhya. Apart from the seven *sutras* already mentioned, the whole of the fourth section (*pada*) of the first chapter (*adhyaya*) and the early portions of both the first and the second sections of the second chapter were designed to refute the Sankhya. Numerically speaking, of the total 555 *sutras* of the text, at least 60 were definitely designed to refute, the doctrine of the *pradhana*, while only 43 were devoted to refutation of other rival schools. Of these 43, only four were specifically against the Jaina views and seventeen against the schools of Buddhist philosophy.[61]

Apart from this numerical consideration, there are other grounds to judge how the Sankhya represented the strongest opposition to the Vedanta standpoint. In the first section of the second chapter, the author, after elaborately refuting the doctrine of the *pradhana*, said, 'Thereby those (theories) also which are not accepted by competent persons are explained.'[62] Samkara[63] commented the following:

> Hitherto we have refuted those objections against the Vedanta texts which, based on reasoning, take their stand on the doctrine of the *pradhana* being the cause of the world.... But now some dull-witted person might think that another objection founded on reasoning might be raised against the Vedanta, namely on the ground of the atomic doctrine. The *sutrakara* (the author of the *sutras*), therefore, extends to the latter objection the refutation of the former, considering that *by the conquest of the most dangerous adversary*

[61] The Sankhya is refuted in the following *sutras*: i. 1. 5-11; i.4.1-28; ii.1.1-11; ii.2.1-10. By comparison, the Jaina views are refuted in ii.2.33-6 and the Buddhist views in ii.2.18-32.

[62] ii.1.12. SBE xxxiv 317. [63] SBE xxxiv, 317-8.

the conquest of the minor enemies is already virtually accomplished. Other doctrines, as, for instance, the atomic doctrine of which no part has been accepted by either Manu or Vyasa or other authorities, are to be considered as 'explained', i.e., refuted by the same reasons which enabled us to dispose of the *pradhana* doctrine.

The comparison on which Samkara based his argument was drawn from the wrestling arena: when you defeat the champion wrestler of the opposite camp, you are no longer required to contest the minors individually (*pradhana malla nivarhana nyaya*). Ramanuja,[64] too, gave practically the same interpretation of this *sutra;* only he made the list of the opponents more exhaustive:

The *sutra* means to say that by the demolition given above of the Sankhya doctrine which is not comprised within the *Veda,* the remaining theories which are in the same position, namely the theories of Kanada, Aksapada, Jina, and Buddha, must likewise be considered as demolished.

Significantly, there is no mention of the Lokayata in this list. Neither do we find any single *sutra* in the entire *Brahma Sutra* directly designed to refute the Lokayata standpoint. The explanation presumably is, that to the author of the text, the refutation of the Sankhya was all that was needed to refute the materialistic standpoint. At least one point is clear: the early representatives of Vedantic idealism understood the Sankhya as a form of crass materialism.

The first reference in the *Brahma Sutra* to the Sankhya system was a reference to a materialistic view. From the point of view of Samkara, Thibaut translated it thus:

On account of seeing (i.e., thinking being attributed in the *Upanisads* to the cause of the world; the *pradhana*) is not (to be identified with the cause indicated by the *Upanisads;* for) it is not founded on scriptures.[65]

After Ramanuja, again, he translated the same *sutra* thus:

On account of seeing (i.e. thinking) that which is not founded on scripture (i.e. *pradhana*) is not (what is taught by the texts referring to the origination of the world).[66]

The two translations are practically the same and this shows that when it is the question of opposing the doctrine of the material first cause, the two idealist philosophers had no difference amongst themselves. Samkara argued elaborately that

64 SBE xlviii. 426.
65 i.1.5. SBE xxxiv. 47.
66 SBE xlviii. 200.

there was no way of interpreting the *pradhana* of the Sankhya as anything but unconscious matter and Ramanuja added,

> thinking cannot belong to the non-sentient *pradhana;* the term Being (of the *Chandogya Upanisad* according to which this Being is the cause of the universe) can therefore denote only the all-knowing highest Person who is capable of thought.[67]

Indeed, if Sankhya was not understood as a form of materialism, there could not have been much sense in such staunch opposition to it on the part of the Vedantists.

6. The Anti-Vedic Origin

According to the classical tradition, only three schools of philosophy—viz the Lokayata, the Buddhist and the Jaina—are regarded as specifically non-Vedic or *nastika,* while the Sankhya is considered to be a form of *astika* philosophy, i.e., affiliated to the Vedic tradition. But this could not have been the standpoint of the *Brahma Sutra,* according to which Sankhya was clearly the strongest of the non-Vedic or anti-Vedic trends.

The *Brahma Sutra* represented only an effort to systematise the philosophy of the *Upanisads* or the Vedanta. According to it, philosophical truth cannot be attained by independent reasoning. It remains revealed in the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads.* The role of reason is confined to a mere analysis of the implications of these texts. It is only logical, therefore, that the author of the *Sutras* as well as the major commentators on these, should, in refuting the Sankhya, have taken the greatest care to prove that this philosophy had nothing to do with the real Vedic tradition and that no passage in the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads* could justify the doctrine of the *pradhana.* Of the sixty aphorisms of the *Brahma Sutra* directly refuting the Sankhya, no less than thirty-seven[68] were designed to prove its non-Vedic and anti-Vedic character. It is a pity that in spite of this conclusive evidence of the authentic orthodox tradition, modern scholars like Garbe, Zimmer and Sastri had to argue over again that original Sankhya must have been thoroughly anti-Vedic.

It would be tedious and unnecessary to quote all the evidences of the *Brahma Sutra* on the anti-Vedic character of original Sankhya. A few examples would suffice our purpose. Said Samkara:

[67] *Ib.* xlviii. 201.

[68] i.1.5-11; i.4.1-28; ii.1.1-2.

> It is impossible to find room in the Vedanta texts for the non-intelligent *pradhana,* the fiction of the Sankhyas; because it is not founded on scripture. How so? Because the quality of seeing, i.e., thinking, is in the scripture ascribed to the cause.[69]

The point is quite clear. Sankhya was the philosophy of the unconscious, i.e., material first cause, whereas according to the *Upanisads,* the first cause was a spiritual principle. There cannot really be any place for a materialistic philosophy within the essentially idealistic treatises.[70] On this point, Ramanuja's argument did not at all differ from that of Samkara.

Both the scholars quoted a large number of passages from the *Upanisads* and subjected these to a thorough analysis only to show that any claim to discover the Sankhya doctrines in these was fictitious. We shall return later to examine some of these passages in connection with the modern views that claim to discover the germs of original Sankhya in the *Upanisads.* For the present we want only to show that the philosophers who represented the really orthodox Indian tradition were not at all prepared to entertain such a claim.

From the standpoint of the *Brahma Sutra,* the heterodox nature of the Sankhya system was absolute. Not to speak of being supported by the *sruti* (i.e., direct revelation, the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads*), Sankhya could not, according to the Vedantists, claim authoritativeness even on the ground of being a *smriti. Smriti* (lit., memory), as contrasted with *sruti,* were texts originally expounded by authoritative sages and remembered by later teachers. The defenders of the Sankhya might claim that being originally traceable to the great sage Kapila, the system enjoyed the status of a *smriti.* An aphorism of the *Brahma Sutra*[71] was designed to answer such a claim. According to the interpretations of both Samkara and Ramanuja, the main points of this *Sutra* may be summed up as follows:

Objection: The doctrine of Brahman, as expounded by the *Brahma Sutra,* cannot be accepted, because it is in conflict with a *smriti,* viz. the *smriti* of Kapila.

Answer: This cannot be a valid argument. If we accept the Sankhya doctrine of *pradhana,* we shall have to reject the clear teachings of certain other *smritis.* As Samkara[72] said,

[69] On *Br. Su.* i.1.5. SBE xxxiv. 47.

[70] It remains for us to discuss in Ch. VIII how this idealistic world-outlook of the *Upanisads* itself emerged on the ruins of an archaic materialism.

[71] ii.1.1.

[72] SBE xxxiv. 292.

If you object to the doctrine of the Lord being the cause of the world on the ground that it would render certain *smritis* purposeless, you thereby render purposeless other *smritis* which declare themselves in favour of the said doctrine.

Samkara[73] quoted the *Puranas*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* to show how all these other *smritis* declared the original cause to be an intelligent principle. Ramanuja[74] wanted to enlarge the list by quoting the *Manu Smriti*, the *Gita* and the *Mahabharata*.

Assuming, therefore, that the Sankhya claim of being a *smriti* was valid, we have here an apparently anomalous situation: the different *smritis* were contradicting each other. Samkara[75] clarified the orthodox position:

As the *purvapaksin* (the opponent, viz. the defender of the Sankhya) opposes us on the ground of *smriti* we reply to him on the ground of *smriti* only; hence the line of defence taken up in the *sutra*. Now it has been shown already that the *sruti*-texts aim at conveying the doctrine that the Lord is the universal cause, and as wherever different *smritis* conflict those maintaining one view must be accepted while those which maintain the opposite view must be set aside, those *smritis* which follow *sruti* are to be considered as authoritative, while all others are to be disregarded.

Again,[76]

even if those 'perfect' men were accepted as authorities to be appealed to, still, as there are many such perfect men, we should have in all those cases where the *smritis* contradict each other in the manner described, no other means to final decision than an appeal to *sruti*.

Among those 'perfect' men the authority of Manu must be accepted as unquestioned; because, argued Samkara,

we have a *sruti*-passage which proclaims the excellence of Manu, viz. *whatever Manu said is medicine* (*Taittiriya Samhita*, ii.2.10.2.). Manu himself....implicitly blames the doctrine of Kapila.[77]

All these gave Samkara the ground to argue the absolutely anti-Vedic character of the Sankhya system: '*the system of Kapila contradicts the Veda, and the doctrine of Manu who follows the Veda*.[78]

However, all these should not give us the impression that the early representatives of the orthodox tradition were really prepared to accept the alleged authoritativeness of Kapila as a perfect sage. According to Samkara, such a hypothesis was at

73 *Ib*. xxxiv. 293.
74 *Ib*. xlviii. 410.
75 *Ib*. xxxiv. 293.
76 *Ib*. xxxiv. 294.
77 *Ib*. xxxiv. 294-5.
78 *Ib*. xxxiv. 295.

best a dubious one. For, though in some of the sacred texts a certain Kapila was praised as a wise sage, there is no valid ground to claim him as the propounder of the Sankhya system:

> The scriptural passage which the *purvapaksin* (objector) has quoted as proving the eminence of Kapila's knowledge would not justify us in believing in such doctrines of Kapila (i.e., of some Kapila) as are contrary to Scripture; for that passage mentions the bare name of Kapila (without specifying which Kapila is meant), and we meet in tradition with another Kapila, viz. the one who burnt the sons of Sagara and had the surname Vasudeva.[79]

One point is clear from all these. According to the authentic exponents of the Vedic tradition itself, the Sankhya system was originally positively hostile to it. Samkara told us in so many words that the Sankhya doctrines were *veda viruddha* (opposed to the *Vedas*) and *vedaanusari manuvacana viruddhaca* (also opposed to the words of Manu, which followed the *Vedas*). In the commentary on the next *sutra* he said that the Sankhya views were not substantiated either by the *Vedas* or by ordinary experiences (*vede loke va upalabhante*).[80] And on this score he was in complete agreement with Ramanuja,[81] who argued that 'Kapila's *smriti* which contains a doctrine opposed to Scripture must be disregarded.'

We may now return to the Sankhya texts—the *Karika* and the *Sutras*—to see how far these retained the original anti-Vedic character of the system. Significantly, in spite of the comparatively later date of the two texts, and in spite of the fact that the Sankhya philosophy as presented even in the *Karika* was largely a compromise with the orthodox standpoint, it is important to observe that traces of the original hostility of the Sankhya to the *Vedas* were not entirely lost in these texts. The *Karika* declared:

> The revealed mode is like the temporal one ineffectual, for it is impure; and it is defective in some respects, as well as excessive in others.[82]

The actual word used in the text, rendered here as 'the revealed mode,' is *anusravika* and the commentator Gaudapada said, "*anusravati*, 'what man successively hears'; *anusravika*, 'that which is thence produced, revealed mode'; that is, established by the *Vedas*." The grounds of the Sankhya objection to the validity

[79] *Ib.* xxxiv. 294.
[80] On *Br. Su.* ii.1.2.
[81] SBE xlviii. 411.
[82] 2.

of the *Vedas* were explained by Gaudapada quite elaborately. Wilson[83] summed these up as follows:

> The *Vedas* are inefficient from their inhumanity in prescribing the shedding of blood: the rewards which they propose are also but temporary, as the gods themselves are finite beings, perishing in each periodical revolution. The immortality spoken of in the *Vedas* is merely a long duration, or until a dissolution of the existent forms of things. The *Vedas* also cause, instead of curing, pain; as the blessings they promise to one man over another are sources of envy and misery to those who do not possess them.

Relics of this original hostility of the Sankhya to the *Vedas* are to be found even in the *Sankhya Sutra*. The Vedic injunctions, said a *sutra*,[84] are not different from the worldly practices. The *srutis* (*anusravika*), said another,[85] cannot lead to the *summum bonum* (*apurusarthattvam*); because the fruits of the Vedic rituals have a beginning (*sadhya*) and therefore also an end (*avrittiyogat*).

Under these circumstances, Garbe[86] rightly commented,

> Originally the Sankhya must have taken up a position of direct opposition to the doctrines of the *Erahmanas*, as is proved *inter alia* by its polemic against their ceremonial.

At the same time it is necessary to note that these two texts on the Sankhya, in spite of retaining traces of the original hostility to the *Vedas*, showed clear marks of compromise with the orthodox standpoint. This is most pronounced in the case of the *Sankhya Sutra*. In the *sutra* immediately following the one in which the possibility of *anusravika* or *sruti* as leading to the *summum bonum* was criticised and denied, it was declared that the *Vedas* limit the non-regeneration of one who has attained discriminative wisdom: *tatra praptavivekasya anavrittih srutih.*[87] The effort of accommodate within the Sankhya standpoint the declaration of the *sruti* is obvious. Similar efforts are to be found in many other *sutras*[88] as well. Even the *Karika*,[89] after criticising *anusravika*, passed on to declare that the *Veda* or *Sruti* was one of the three sources of valid knowledge. The actual word used is *aptavacana* and explained as *apta srutih apta vacanah* (by *apta* is meant the statement of the authoritative persons as well as the *sruti*). These two attitudes to Vedic authority—the rejection as well as the acceptance of it — are contradictory and

83 Colebrooke SK 13. 84 i. 6. 85 i. 82.
86 ERE xi. 189. 87 i. 83.
88 i.154; iv.3; vi.51; vi.58; vi.59.
89 4 & 5.

the contradiction is resolved only by assuming that the former represented the standpoint of the earlier, i.e., of original Sankhya while the latter was the result of subsequent compromise. That some of the later philosophers were trying to bring Sankhya along the orthodox lines is further evidenced by the *Brahma Sutra* itself, where the claim was repeatedly refuted that it was possible to find *sruti*-support for the Sankhya. Presumably, such a claim had been quite strong even during Badarayaṇa's times. In spite of such a claim, however, the fact clearly stands out that original Sankhya was sharply opposed to the Vedic authority and as such the earlier representatives of authentic orthodoxy like Samkara and Ramanuja were obliged to look at Sankhya as the most outstanding form of heterodoxy. Some of the modern scholars have argued the point over again.

Referring to the Sankhya, Zimmer[90] observed:

> These ideas do not belong to the original stock of Vedic Brahmanic tradition. Nor, on the other hand, do we find among the basic teachings of the Sankhya and the Yoga any hint at such a pantheon of divine Olympians beyond the vicissitudes of earthly bondage as that of the Vedic gods. The two ideologies are of distinct origin, the Sankhya and the Yoga being related to the mechanical system of the Jainas, which, as we have seen, can be traced back, in a partially historical, partially legendary way, through the long series of the Tirthankaras, to a remote, aboriginal non-Vedic antiquity.

Said Garbe:[91]

> The origin of the Sankhya system appears in the proper light only when we understand that in those regions of India which were little influenced by Brahmanism the first attempt had been made to explain the riddles of the world and of our existence merely by means of reason. For the Sankhya philosophy is, in its essence, not only atheistic but also inimical to *Veda*. All appeal to *sruti* in the Sankhya texts lying before us are subsequent additions. We may altogether remove the Vedic elements, grafted upon the system, and it will not in the least be affected thereby. The Sankhya philosophy had been originally, and has remained up to the present day, in its real contents, un-Vedic and independent of the Brahmanical tradition.

Garbe has drawn our attention to the fact that in the *Mahabharata* the Sankhya and the Yoga were mentioned as separate from the *Vedas*, 'existing by the side of all *Vedas*.' But if such is the case, how is it that Sankhya was eventually accepted as an orthodox system? Garbe[92] has answered the question thus:

[90] PI 281.
[91] ACOPVMCSS intro. xx-xxi
[92] *Ib*. xxi-ii.

That the Sankhya philosophy appears in later times among the orthodox systems, is not to be wondered at; the fact proves that this system, on account of its sober lucidness, has stood its ground against Vedantic supernaturalism, and that consequently the Brahmanas have adopted it, owing to their great ability of appropriating all intellectual elements of importance.... The last nominal acknowledgement of the *Veda* and of the prerogatives of the *Brahmanas* was surely sufficient for a system passing as orthodox; and if the Buddhists had not refused to acknowledge the authority of the *Vedas* and of the *Brahmanas,* they might, without any essential alteration of their doctrines have become a Brahmanical sect, and Buddha a *risi,* like his predecessor Kapila.

The latter part of this comment appears doubtful. Apart from the hypothetical receptivity of the Brahmanical mind, the fact remains that the Sankhya philosophers of the later times could earn the recognition of the orthodox tradition only by surrendering the essential contentions of original Sankhya. The later Sankhya was, to all philosophical purpose, reduced to the position of idealistic metaphysics, retaining only a formal allegiance to its original terminology.

Nevertheless, Garbe's observations on the anti-Vedic character of original Sankhya is important, particularly because he has drawn our attention to the circumstance that its home was outside the pale of Vedic influence. The rise of Sankhya, he said,[93] 'may be attributed to the same district of India as produced Buddhism.' We quote Sastri,[94] who continued this argument:

Did Sankhya represent the views of the Vedic Aryans? Samkara referred to it as a non-Vedic view, like Buddhism.... According to the ancient tradition, the Sankhya views were the views of Kapila. Kapila belonged to the Northern regions of the country, that is, the areas of the Vangas, the Vagadhas and the Ceras. We find Kapilasrama, the hermitage of Kapila, on the route to Gangasagara. Kapila's village was situated on the banks of Kavataksa; Kapilavastu, too, was the abode of Kapila.

This placing of the original home of the Sankhya in the north-eastern regions of the country is significant. For these were also the regions of mother-right and of Tantrism. As a matter of fact the relics of both in these areas are very strong even today.[95] This historical evidence, therefore, goes in favour of our hypothesis that original Sankhya might have been a development of Tantrism. We are naturally reminded here of a remarkable hint in the *Mahabharata,* according to which the

93 ERE xi. 189. 94 *BD* (B) 37.

95 Relics of mother-right and Tantrism in South India and their possible relation to the Sankhya deserves to be seriously investigated into.

original propounder of the system could have been a female, a certain Kapilaa rather than Kapila.

The names of two of the early teachers of the Sankhya have come down to us. These are Pancasikha and Asuri. As the *Karika*[96] said,

This great purifying (doctrine, i.e. Sankhya) the sage (Kapila) compassionately imparted to Asuri, Asuri taught it to Pancasikha, by whom it was extensively propagated.

In the *Mahabharata*,[97] too, we come across the names of Asuri and Pancasikha with the same teacher-disciple relation between them. What is striking about this *Mahabharata* evidence, however, is that at least in this chapter of the epic, it is not mentioned that Asuri was a disciple of Kapila. More significant than this is the other name used in the *Mahabharata* for Pancasikha. It is *Kaapila* or *Kaapileya* or *Kapilaaputra*, i.e., born of a certain woman called Kapilaa. The author of this chapter of the *Mahabharata* was anxious to tell us how Pancasikha acquired this peculiar name. He said that Kapilaa was the wife of Asuri and, when Pancasikha was staying with Asuri as his disciple, she used to give him the milk of her own breast. That gave Pancasikha the name *Kapilaaputra*.

It was indeed strange for an adult disciple to be breast-fed by the preceptor's wife; the myth could not obviously be true in the form in which it is presented in the *Mahabharata*. But it is possible that it retained some elements of truth. We have to take the story of Kapilaa breast-feeding Pancasikha in a figurative sense and if we do so the myth might suggest the story of an original female preceptor of the Sankhya system. Could it be that the *Mahabharata* myth was the offshoot of a very ancient tradition, according to which the early Sankhya philosophers were disciples of female teachers and the original name Kapilaa, under patriarchal conditions, was eventually changed into that of Kapila? The suggestion will not appear wild if we remember that too little is positively known about Kapila to reject the possibility outright and, further, the original home of the Sankhya was presumably those areas of the country which were, from a very remote antiquity, under strong influence of mother-right and the Tantrika ideology. The Sankhya could have been only a development of Tantrism and Tantrism originally knew only female preceptors.

[96] 70. [97] *Santiparva* Ch. 218 (Citrasala Press).

7. The Place of Purusa

We have already noted that the Sankhya was known to the ancients as the doctrine of the *pradhana*. This is the typical form in which Samkara and Ramanuja referred to it.

Pradhana literally means the primary, the original, the chief or the first. In the Sankhya, however, it is used in the technical sense of the primordial or primeval matter or, more strictly, matter in its original pre-evolved state, i.e., a state of matter from which the world or the universe was yet to evolve. If Sankhya was consistently characterised as the doctrine of the *pradhana*, the obvious implication is that according to this philosophy the primary matter was the ultimate reality, the cause of the universe.

The other term for *pradhana* is *prakriti* or, more strictly, the *mula-prakriti*, literally the root-*prakriti*. As Gaudapada[98] said, *mula prakritih pradhanam*, the root-*prakriti* is called *pradhana*. Apart from this *pradhana* or *prakriti*, however, the Sankhya recognised also the principle of *purusa* or, more strictly, a multiplicity of them. *Purusa* literally means the male. However, even in the version of the Sankhya as represented in the commentaries on the *Brahma Sutra*, we find the word used in a distinctly technical sense to mean the Self or the principle of consciousness. Therefore the question whether original Sankhya is to be understood as a materialistic philosophy or not can be fully answered only after discussing two further points. First, even accepting *purusa* to mean the Self or the principle of consciousness, we have to determine what after all could have been its logical status within the general structure of original Sankhya. Secondly, we have to ask ourselves whether the word *purusa* originally meant something different and this meaning of Self or the principle of consciousness was the result of Vedantic influence on the Sankhya.

The logical status of the *purusa* first. As contrasted with *prakriti*, *purusa* in the Sankhya was secondary or *a-pradhana*. The commonest epithet for it used to be *udasina* or the indifferent. We find this epithet in the commentaries on the *Brahma Sutra*;[99] even the *Karika*[100] is not without it. This may cause one to wonder why the propounders of the Sankhya should have at all felt the necessity of recognising the *purusas* over and above the self-sufficient primeval matter, if the *purusas* were totally indifferent to the actual world-process and if these had no part

[98] On *SK* 3.
[99] E.g. Samkara on ii.2.7.
[100] 20.

to play in the evolution of the visible world from the pre-evolved original matter? And why should these have any place in the scheme of reality at all? As we shall see, there were more reasons than the individual inclinations of certain philosophers behind the recognition of this principle of the *purusas*, however much anomalous, from the point of view of logical understanding, might have been their position in a system which was essentially the doctrine of *pradhana*.

In accordance with the procedure we have adopted, we may begin with an analysis of the evidence of the *Brahma Sutra*. Said Samkara:

> We willingly allow room for those portions of the two systems (Sankhya and Yoga) which do not contradict the *Veda*. In their description of the Soul (*purusa*), for instance, as free from all qualities the Sankhyas are in harmony with the *Veda* which teaches that the person (*purusa*) is essentially pure: e.g. *Br. Up.* iv.3.16,—'For that person is not attached to anything.'[101]

This comment has more significance than is apparent. If the Sankhya was condemned as being not only opposed to the *Vedas* but also to the teachings of the genuine followers of the *Vedas*, it must have been highly peculiar for the system to allow room for a 'description of the Soul in harmony with the *Veda*,' unless of course the whole thing was surreptitiously borrowed by some later exponents of Sankhya from the circle of philosophers who were really the followers of the *Vedas*. We are going to argue that this was precisely what was done by Isvarakrishna in his *Karika*. Nevertheless, the Vedantic conception of the *purusa* thus borrowed, was never fully reconciled to the fundamentals of the Sankhya. These were the doctrines of *pradhana*, *parinama* (namely, the effect being real as contrasted with the Vedantic doctrine of the effect being ultimately unreal, known as *vivarta-vada*), and of the multiplicity of the *purusas* (*purusa bahutvam*). Ultimately, only by surrendering these fundamentals of original Sankhya, the later philosophers could logically retain the conception of the *purusa* as pure consciousness. The real implication of Samkara's comment, therefore, could only be that he would have no quarrel with the Sankhya philosophers had they agreed to stick seriously to this view of the *purusa*, because they would thus remain followers of the Sankhya in name, whereas in fact, they would be merely logically driven to the position of being disguised Vedantists.

101 On *Br. Su.* ii.1.3. SBE xxxiv. 298.

The other alternative is to take this comment of Samkara on its face value. But we cannot do so. For the doctrine of the *purusa* along with the *pradhana*, *parinama* and *purusa bahutvam* was never really acceptable to Samkara. There were many reasons why he was obliged to reject it. We may discuss here only two. First, Samkara was not only an idealist but also an extreme monist. The Self, which was to him the ultimate reality, was one and its oneness was absolute and unique. By contrast, a plurality of the *purusas* formed an essential feature of original Sankhya and even the author of the *Karika* could not fully surrender it. Secondly, according to the Vedanta, this Self or the *purusa* alone being real, the empirical manifold was unreal, the product of ignorance or *avidya*. That is, in the ultimate analysis, the causation of the phenomenal world from the *purusa* was only fictitious (*vivarta*)—something like the conjuring up of a magical show on the stage by the magician. On the other hand, from the Sankhya point of view, the *pradhana* being real and the visible world being a real effect (*parinama*) of the *pradhana*, too, was basically real and yet the *purusas* had absolutely no part in the causation of it. Even the author of the *Karika*, whatever might have been the position he was ultimately driven to, did not fully surrender the doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama* and, therefore, even his view of the *purusa* could not be really acceptable to Samkara. And if we are prepared to go beyond the *Karika* and try to reconstruct original Sankhya mainly on the basis of its doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama* (and reject the *Karika* conception of the *purusa* because of its inconsistencies with the fundamentals of the Sankhya), we would have glimpses of a philosophy which must have been outspokenly opposed to the standpoint of Samkara. When the basic reality of the visible world is categorically asserted, as in the Sankhya, and the *purusas* are said to have nothing to do towards the causation of it, the whole philosophy amounts to the assertion that the place of the *purusas* (whatever these might have originally meant) is utterly unimportant and even redundant or superfluous. When, on the other hand, as in the Vedanta, the *purusa* is looked upon as the ultimate reality and the world-process as a whole as ultimately illusory, the entire philosophy is to be accepted as designed to make the Self or the *purusa* so overwhelmingly important that by contrast the importance of everything else melts into nothingness. It was thus impossible for Samkara to read his own philosophy in the Sankhya view of the

purusas and there is no doubt that he actually argued against it.

First, according to the Sankhya, there is a multiplicity of *purusas*. Argued Samkara:

Kapila, by acknowledging a plurality of Selfs, does not admit the doctrine of there being one universal Self. In the *Mahabharata*, also, the question is raised whether there are many persons (souls) or one; thereupon the opinion of others is mentioned, 'There are many persons (*purusas*), O King, according to the Sankhya and the Yoga philosophers'; that opinion is controverted: 'Just as there is one place of origin (viz. the earth) for many persons, so I will proclaim to you that universal person (*purusa*) raised by his qualities,' and, finally, it is declared that there is one universal Self, 'He is the internal Self of me, of thee, and of all other embodied beings, the internal witness of all, not to be apprehended by any one. He the all-headed, all-armed, all-footed, all-eyed, all-nosed one, moves through all beings according to his will and liking.' And scriptures also declare that there is one universal Self.[102]

As a matter of fact, this view of there being many Selfs, is, according to Samkara, one of the strongest grounds on which the Sankhya was to be considered as thoroughly anti-Vedic.

It may be noted that the doctrine of the multiplicity of the *purusas* was, as evidenced by the early Vedanta literature, an intrinsic feature of original Sankhya. The *Karika*, in so far as it tried to offer definite arguments for the doctrine, was thus retaining the old spirit.

We may pause here a little to discuss these arguments as they have some interesting light to throw on the fundamental difference between the Sankhya and the Vedanta.

Since birth, death and the instruments of life (the sensory and motor endowments) are allotted severally; since occupations are not at once universal; and since the *gunas* are different in different cases; —multitude of *purusas* is demonstrated.[103]

Thus, the grounds for the existence of many Selfs were as follows:

(1) The different individuals have differences among themselves as to birth, death and the sensory and motor endowments. As Gaudapada[104] explained the argument,

Thus, if there was but one soul, then when one was born, all would be born; when one died, all would die; if there was any defect in the vital instruments of one, such as deafness, blindness, dumbness, mutilation, or lameness, then all would be blind, deaf, dumb, maimed, and halt: but this is not the case; and therefore, from the several apportionment of death, birth and instruments of life, multiplicity of souls is demonstrated.

102 On *Br. Su.* ii.1.1.SBE xxxiv. 295.
103 *SK* 18.
104 Colebrooke SK 57-8

Gaudapada used here the word *atma* or soul; but that might not have been true to the spirit of the *Karika*. For, the differences in the sensory and motor organs, which, according to the text, were the ground for the existence of many *purusas* (*purusa-bahutvam*), could not obviously be the characteristics of the soul. Presumably, the *Karika* was here taking a rather commonsense view of the *purusas* as the individual human beings with their physical characteristics like birth, death and the possession of the sensory and motor organs. It is not any metaphysical view of the soul and obviously farthest from the highly abstract view of the Self as pure consciousness. This is also evident from the other two grounds adduced by the *Karika* for the existence of many Selfs.

(2) The different individuals differ from each other in their respective activities. As Gaudapada[105] explained the arguments,

> *Since occupations are not at once universal. Yugapat* means, 'at one time.' *Not at once;* or, at one time. Occupation: as engaging in acts of virtue and the like are not observed to occur at one moment; but some are busy with virtuous, others with vicious, actions; some cultivate indifference to the world, and some acquire true wisdom; therefore, from the non-contemporaneousness of occupation, multitude of souls is concluded.

(3) Different individuals differ from each other in having difference in the three *gunas*. This argument is most interesting. By the three *gunas* are meant the three constituents of *prakriti*, called the *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*. *Prakriti* being essentially material, its constituents, too, must have been the same. Thus if, according to the *Karika* argument one of the proofs for the multiplicity of the *purusas* be the preponderance of the different *gunas* in the different individuals, it must be admitted that the *gunas* were, somehow or other, conceived by the text as constitutive of the *purusas*. This gives us a conception of the *purusas* quite different from that of the Vedantic view of the Self as pure consciousness.

What, then, was the fundamental assumption upon which all the three proofs for the existence of the multiplicity of *purusas* were based? The assumption was that the concrete and visible world of experience—the world in which different individuals were born and died had all sorts of motor and sensory endowments and exhibited differences in basic personality (some having a preponderance of *sattva*, others of *rajas* or *tamas*)—

[105] *Ib*. 58.

must have been accepted as fundamentally real; or else, all the arguments would fall through. This leads us to consider the second point on which the Sankhya view of the *purusas* fundamentally differed from the Vedantic one.

According to the Sankhya, the experienced world was basically real, while the *purusas* had no participation in its causation. The obvious corollary made the *purusas* utterly insignificant. According to the Vedanta, too, the *purusa* had no real participation in the actual world process, but this was because the world process as a whole was ultimately unreal and as such the *purusa* alone had supreme reality. Thus the problem of the difference between the Sankhya and the Vedanta is reduced to one question: Is the experienced world to be accepted as real or not?

That the Sankhya answer to the question was definitely in the affirmative is evidenced negatively by the Vedanta refutation of it. In his *Sarva Darsana Samgraha*, Madhavacarya,[106] following in the footsteps of Samkara very closely, opened the discussion on the Sankhya with the following question:

> But how can we accept the doctrine of illusory emanation (the Vedanta view) when the system of development propounded by the Sankhyas is still alive to oppose it?

Hence, like Samkara, Madhava also felt the necessity of refuting the Sankhya. Indeed, the controversy between the Sankhya and the Vedanta, as evidenced by the *Brahma Sutra* and the commentaries on it, had largely been a controversy between *parinama vada* and *vivarta vada*. That the world was of the nature of an effect and that the effect was potentially contained within the cause were admitted by both the systems. However, they differed as to the reality of the effect. According to the Sankhya, the effect was real (*parinama vada*) and as such the world (as the effect of the *pradhana*) was also real. This is the very opposite of the Vedanta standpoint, according to which, the effect could not be real (*vivarta vada*) and as such the world (as the effect of the Brahman) could not have any ultimate claim to reality. As a matter of fact, the very proof of the existence of the *pradhana* in the Sankhya, rested on the assumption of the reality of the empirical world.

It is in this context that we are to judge the possible status of the *purusa* in original Sankhya. The crucial question, again, is: Had the *purusa* any genuine participation in the world-

[106] *SDS* (Cowell) 221.

process? We shall have to examine how the author of the *Karika*, in surreptitiously introducing the really Vedantic concept of the *purusa* into the Sankhya system, laid himself bare to all sorts of contradictions in order to face this question. We may, however, begin with the writings of Samkara, because, being a conscious idealist, he could clearly perceive the fundamental issue between idealism and materialism and show that in spite of this artificial acceptance of the idealistic view of the *purusa*, the later Sankhya philosophers like Isvarakrisna could not come out of the meshes of the original materialism.

We shall confine ourselves particularly to Samkara's commentary on the second section of the second chapter of the *Brahma Sutra*, where he proposed to refute the arguments of the Sankhya philosophers 'in an independent manner, without reference to the Vedanta texts.'[107]

Samkara[108] represented the position of the Sankhya thus:

> Just as jars, dishes and other products which possess the common quality of consisting of clay are seen to have for their cause clay in general; so we must suppose that all the outward and inward (i.e., inanimate and animate) effects which are endowed with the characteristics of *sattva, rajas* and *tamas* have for their causes *sattva, rajas* and *tamas* in general. These, in their generality, constitute the threefold *pradhana*. This *pradhana*, which is *non-intelligent, evolves itself spontaneously into multiform modifications,* in order thus *to effect the purposes* (i.e., enjoyment, release and so on) *of the intelligent soul.*

We have emphasised two points in this quotation. First, the non-intelligent (i.e., unconscious or material) *pradhana* evolves itself *spontaneously* into this visible world. Secondly, the entire process of evolution is to effect the purposes of the intelligent soul. There is no doubt that Samkara was representing here the Sankhya position in the lines of the *Karika*. However, the second of these two points was clearly the effort of the later Sankhya philosophers to make room, though artificially and inconsistently, for elements of idealistic thought within the Sankhya. This aspect of later Sankhya was never fully reconciled with its other aspect, as expressed by the first of the above points, viz. that the *pradhana* or the primeval matter spontaneously evolved itself into the real visible world.

What particularly interests us about Samkara's argument is that he made this point his main target. The real issue, he told

[107] On *Br. Su.* ii.2.1.
[108] *Ib.* SBE xxxiv. 364. Italics added.

us, was the issue concerning the *causation of the world and its ultimate claim to reality*. In spite of introducing the idealistic conception of the Self into the system and in spite of claiming that the whole process of evolution was meant to serve the purposes of this Self, the *Karika* version of the Sankhya persisted in representing very strong philosophical opposition to Samkara, because it also retained the heritage of the original materialistic standpoint in claiming that consciousness had no rôle in its production. Samkara's arguments interest us further because it enables us to see that the idealistic premise, viz. that the principle of consciousness is the real cause of the universe, logically results in the conclusion that the universe is unreal, a position that could never be acceptable to the Sankhya philosophers as long as they stuck to their doctrine of causality (*parinama vada*).

Let us follow the arguments of Samkara in outline.

Said the *Brahma Sutra*:[109]

> That which is inferred (by the Sankhyas, viz. the *pradhana*) cannot be the cause (of the world), on account of the orderly arrangement (of the world) being impossible (on that hypothesis).

It is to be noted that the hypothesis designed to be refuted by the *sutra* is that non-intelligent (*acetana*, unconscious or material) *pradhana and nothing else* is the cause of the world. The Sankhya argument for the existence of the *pradhana*, as we shall see, was based on its doctrine of causality: the nature of the cause is to be inferred from the nature of the effect, i.e., in accordance with it and, as such, the basic characteristics of the material world are to be inferred as characterising its cause. Presumably, the basis of this doctrine of causality was the observation of the facts of nature, called parallel instances (*dristanta vala*) by Samkara: jars, dishes and other products which possess the common quality of consisting of clay, for example, must have their cause as clay in general. This led Samkara[110] to argue:

> If you Sankhyas base your theory on parallel instances merely, we point out that a non-intelligent thing which, without being guided by an intelligent being, spontaneously produces effects capable of subserving the purposes of some particular person is nowhere observed in the world. We rather observe that houses, palaces, couches, pleasure-grounds and the like—things which according to circumstances are conducive to the obtainment of pleasure or the avoidance of pain—are made by workmen endowed with intelligence. Now look at this entire world which appears, on the one hand, as external (i.e., inanimate) in the form of earth and the other elements enabling

[109] ii.2.1. [110] *Ib.* SBE xxxiv. 364-5.

(the souls) to enjoy the fruits of their various actions, and, on the other hand, as animate, in the form of bodies which belong to the different classes of beings, possess a definite arrangement of organs, and are therefore capable of constituting the abodes of fruition; look, we say, at this world, of which the most ingenious workmen cannot even form a conception in their minds, and then say if a non-intelligent principle like the *pradhana* is able to fashion it! Other non-intelligent things such as stones and clods of earth are certainly not seen to possess analogous powers. We rather must assume that just as clay and similar substances are seen to fashion themselves into various forms, if worked upon by potters and the like, so the *pradhana* also (when modifying itself into its effects) is ruled by some intelligent principle. When endeavouring to determine the nature of the primal cause (of the world), there is no need for us to take our stand on those attributes only which form part of the nature of material causes such as clay, etc., and not on those also which belong to extraneous agents such as potters etc.

That is, as Thibaut[111] wanted to sum up the argument,

If we attempt to infer the nature of the universal cause from its effects on the ground of parallel instances, as, for instance, that of an earthen jar whose material cause is clay, we must remember that the jar has sprung from clay not without the cooperation of an intelligent being, viz. the potter.

At least one point seems to be quite clear. The Sankhya, as refuted by Samkara, considered the material cause to be self-sufficient for the purpose of producing the world. At the same time Samkara obviously knew that there was in the Sankhya the principle of the *purusa* over and above the principle of the *pradhana* and some of the Sankhya philosophers like the author of the *Karika* were already interpreting this *purusa* on the idealistic line as the Self or pure consciousness. The implication of Samkara's writings, therefore, is that even this concession to idealism was not sufficiently satisfactory to a full fledged idealist like himself, because the principle of consciousness could not yet be raised to the status of the cause of the world and the material world with its ultimate cause as primordial matter remained real. Thus the principle of *purusa*, in spite of being idealistically interpreted, retained only an anomalous position in the *Karika* version of the Sankhya.

In his commentary on the next *sutra* Samkara continued the same line of argument and thereby strengthened our impression of the same anomalous position of the *purusas* in the doctrine of the *pradhana*. Said the *sutra*:[112] 'And on account of (the impossibility of) activity.' Commented Samkara: [113]

111 SBE xxxiv. 365 n. 112 ii.2.2.
113 SBE xxxiv. 367.

Leaving the arrangement of the world, we now pass on to the activity by which it is produced.... Now these activities again cannot be ascribed to a non-intelligent *pradhana* left to itself, as no such activity is seen in clay and similar substances, or in chariots and the like. For we observe that clay and the like, and chariots—which are in their own nature non-intelligent—enter on activities tending towards particular effects only when they are acted upon by intelligent beings such as potters, etc. in the one case, and horses and the like in the other case. From what is seen we determine what is not seen. Hence, a non-intelligent cause is not to be inferred because, on that hypothesis, the activity without which the world cannot be produced would be impossible.

One point, again, is clear. The Sankhya philosophers of Samkara's times still attributed all activities to the *non-intelligent pradhana left to itself*. Samkara elucidated his own position in the traditional Indian manner of raising some possible objection against it, i.e., from the Sankhya point of view, and then answering it from his own standpoint, i.e., by showing the futility of all possible defences of the Sankhya standpoint. We may sum up this chain of arguments for a clear idea of how the Sankhya philosophers were still thinking that the principle of primeval matter was self-sufficient for explaining all the changes in the world and also the original change that caused the world.

According to the Sankhya, it is not necessary to postulate any principle of intelligence or consciousness for explaining movement or change. In fact, observation of nature (*dristanta vala*) teaches us that movements and modifications are to be found always in some material entity rather than in any principle of intelligence or consciousness. Why then should we at all think of any principle of intelligence to account for movements and modifications?

Commented Samkara:[114]

A thing, we reply, which is itself devoid of motion may nevertheless move other things. The magnet is itself devoid of motion, and yet it moves iron; and colours and other objects of sense, although themselves devoid of motion, produce movements in the eyes and other organs of sense. So the Lord also who is all-present, the Self of all, all-knowing and all-powerful may, although himself unmoving, move the universe.

Whatever might have been the source from which Samkara drew these analogies, he was clearly conscious of the fact that such a line of argument could not really be consistent with his own fundamental philosophical position. That is why he hastened to add:

[114] On *Br. Su.* ii.2.2. SBE xxxiv. 369.

If it finally be objected that (on the Vedanta doctrine) there is no room for a moving power as in consequence of the oneness (a-duality) of Brahman (the ultimate reality which, according to the Vedanta, is the Self or pure consciousness) no motion can take place; we reply that such objections have repeatedly been refuted by our pointing to the fact of the Lord being fictitiously connected with *maya* (the indescribable illusion which, according to the Vedanta, accounts for the world-appearance), which consists of name and form presented by Nescience. Hence motion can be reconciled with the doctrine of an all-knowing first cause.[115]

Thus Samkara made the other issue between idealism and materialism quite clear: change and movement can indeed be reconciled with an intelligent first cause *only by denying their reality*. It was thus a controversy not merely over the question of the primacy of spirit or matter but also on the problem of the reality of change or movement. We can now clearly see why an extreme idealist like Samkara had to argue against the *parinama vada* of the Sankhya philosophers as tenaciously as against their *pradhana karana vada*. The two issues were logically interlinked. But more of this later.

What particularly interests us in the present context is a different question: Accepting the reality of change and movement, how were the Sankhya philosophers trying to explain them? It is understood that from the Sankhya standpoint no spiritual principle participated in these, i.e., *pradhana* alone was responsible for all change. But the question is, how exactly do all changes result from the primeval matter? There are grounds to infer that in answer to this question the early Sankhya philosophers developed a theory which is surprisingly similar to the scientific view of the laws of nature.

'If it be said,' we read in the *Brahma Sutra*,[116] '(that the *pradhana* moves) like milk or water, (we reply that) there also (the motion is due to intelligence).' Commenting on this Samkara[117] said that the Sankhya philosophers would represent their own position thus:

As non-sentient milk flows forth from its own nature (*svabhavenaeva*) merely for the nourishment of the young animal, and as non-sentient water, from its own nature (*svabhavenaeva*), flows along for the benefit of mankind; so the *pradhana* also, although non-intelligent, may be supposed to move from its own nature (*svabhavenaeva*) merely for the purpose of effecting the highest end of man (*purusartha siddhaye*).

The concept of *purusartha siddhi*, i.e., the purpose of effecting the highest end of the *purusa*, was evidently taken by

[115] SBE xxxiv. 369. [116] ii.2.3. [117] SBE xxxiv. 369.

Samkara from the *Karika* version of the Sankhya and, as we shall see, the author of the *Karika*, in introducing this concept into the Sankhya system, had to expose himself to logical incongruities. What interests us, however, is Samkara's use of the word *svabhava* (lit., 'nature') in the descripiton of the Sankhya position. Evidently, according to the Sankhya philosophers, it is only because of the natural laws (*svabhavenaeva*) rather than any spiritual principle that the primeval matter modified itself into the world of nature. That such was really the standpoint of original Sankhya may be argued from its internal consistency with the materialistic outlook. If the Sankhya was originally only the doctrine of *pradhana*, we naturally expect it to have also been the doctrine of *svabhava* (*svabhava vada*) for the former is logically incomplete without the latter. Significantly, Gaudapada, in spite of all the idealistic twists in his interpretation of the Sankhya, had to admit, however reluctantly and casually it might have been, that 'according to the Sankhya philosophers there is a certain kind of cause called *svabhava*.'[118] This doctrine of *svabhava* naturally reminds us of the *svabhava vada* so frequently attributed to the Lokayatikas, which was a doctrine of natural laws, though some of the modern scholars, because of their repulsion for the materialistic standpoint as such, have tried to ridicule it as the doctrine of the denial of cause.[119]

That early Sankhya was really maintaining the doctrine of natural law (*svabhava vada*) is further evidenced by the following from the *Brahma Sutra*:[120]

> Nor (can it be said that the *pradhana* modifies itself spontaneously) like grass, etc. (which turn into milk); for (milk) does not exist elsewhere (but in the female animal).

Samkara,[121] commenting on it, said that the Sankhya philosophers would like to present their case thus:

> Just as grass, herbs, water, etc., independently of any other instrumental cause (*nimitta antara nirapeksa*) transform themselves, by their own nature (*svabhavat eva*), into milk; so, we assume, the *pradhana* also transforms itself into the Great Principle (*mahat*) and so on. And, if you ask how we know that grass transforms itself independently of any instrumental cause; we reply, 'Because no such cause is observed.' For if we did perceive some such cause, we certainly should apply it to grass, etc., according to our liking, and thereby produce milk. But as a matter of fact, we do no such thing. Hence the transformation of grass and

118 On *SK* 27.
119 ERE viii. 494.
120 ii.2.5.
121 SBE xxxiv. 371.

the like must be considered to be due to its own nature merely; and we may infer therefrom that the transformation of the *pradhana* is of the same kind.

Samkara's own refutation of this *svabhava vada* is hardly satisfactory. He argued that

grass becomes milk only when it is eaten by a cow or some other female animal, not if it is left either uneaten or is eaten by a bull. If the transformation had no special cause, grass would become milk even on other conditions than that of entering a cow's body.[122]

Further,

men also are able, by applying a means in their power, to produce milk from grass and herbs: for when they wish to produce a more abundant supply of milk they feed the cow more plentifully and thus obtain more milk from her.[123]

In arguments like these, the real point of *svabhava vada* is somewhat distorted. The question is, whether it is necessary to postulate any extra-natural cause, over and above the merely natural, to explain changes and modifications. The evidence of the necessity of the physiological apparatus of the female animal does not indicate any extra-natural cause. From the point of view of *svabhava vada* the cause of milk would not be grass as such but the entire natural complex, viz. grass-as-eaten-by-the-cow. *Svabhava vada* could be refuted only on the basis of the demonstration that some further spiritual factor is necessary for the causation of milk. That men can get a more abundant supply of milk by feeding the cow more plentifully only proves that *man can conquer nature only by recognising the laws of nature.*

We do not have any direct evidence to prove that the early Sankhya philosophers were actually drawing all these implications of their *svabhava vada*. That their views carried the germs which could be developed into these lines cannot, however, be doubted. Thus, it was their *pradhana vada*—the doctrine of a material first cause—which made the Sankhya philosophers the precursors of the scientific view of the laws of nature.

At the same time, even in the *Karika* we find distinct efforts to present the Sankhya from the idealistic standpoint. As is only to be expected, therefore, the emphasis on the original *svabhava vada* is no longer there. The author of the text tried his best to make the *purusa*, understood in the almost Vedantic sense, responsible for all change, including the original modification of the *pradhana*. Samkara, himself a highly consistent idealist, could clearly see the futility of such efforts to reconcile

122 *Ib.*

123 *Ib.* xxxiv. 371-2.

the fundamental principles of idealism with materialism. The whole theory of the *purusa* as the passive moving power behind the *prakriti,* seemed to him to be a gross self-contradiction:

> Beyond the *pradhana* there exists (according to the Sankhya) no external principle which could either impel the *pradhana* to activity or restrain it from activity. The soul (*purusa*) as we know, is indifferent (*udasina*)—neither moves to, nor restrains from action. As therefore the *pradhana* stands in no relation. it is impossible to see why it should sometimes modify itself into the great principle (*mahat*) and sometimes not.[124]

Further, Samkara went on arguing, it cannot be claimed from the Sankhya point of view that the *purusa,* in spite of being perfectly passive, indirectly initiates and guides the world-process just as the magnet activises the iron without being itself active, or, as a lame man sitting motionless on the shoulder of a blind man may guide the movements of the latter. Such a defence of the Sankhya would in effect amount to a surrender of the fundamentals of the philosophy,

> according to which the *pradhana* is moving of itself, and the (indifferent and inactive) soul possesses no moving power. And how should the indifferent soul move the *pradhana*? A man, although lame, may make a blind man move by means of words and the like; but the soul which is devoid of action and qualities cannot possibly put forth any moving energy. Nor can it be said that it moves the *pradhana* by its mere proximity, as the magnet moves the iron; for from the permanency of proximity (of the *purusa* to the *pradhana*) a permanency of motion would follow. The proximity of the magnet, on the other hand (to the iron), is not permanent, but depends on a certain activity and the adjustment of the magnet in a certain position; hence the lame (man) and the magnet do not supply really parallel instances. The *pradhana* being the non-intelligent and the *purusa indifferent, and there being no third principle to connect them, there can be no connection of the two.*[125]

The instances of the magnet-iron and the lame-blind occur in the *Karika* and there is no doubt that Samkara was criticising here the *Karika*-version of the philosophy. It is obvious, therefore, that the author of the text, surrendering the doctrine of *svabhava* and trying to make the *purusa* responsible for all changes and modifications, only made the Sankhya standpoint internally inconsistent. Since there is no ground to argue that original Sankhya was internally inconsistent, and since, as Samkara argued, the *pradhana* being unconscious matter and the *purusa* just indifferent there can be no connection between the two, the theory of such a connection as expounded in the *Karika* must have been a concoction of the later thinkers grafted on original Sankhya. We are thus left only with two alternative presump-

[124] *Ib.* xxxiv. 370. [125] *Ib.* xxxiv. 374. Italics added.

tions as to the nature of original Sankhya. Either it was not the doctrine of the *pradhana* at all, or the role of the *purusa* in it (and even the meaning of the *purusa* itself) was quite different from the one we are accustomed to think under the influence of the *Karika*. The evidence of the *Brahma Sutra* being decisively against the first, we are left only with the second alternative.

But if it was so, if the meaning as well as the role attributed to the *purusa* in the *Karika* had been alien to original Sankhya, there could not have been much difference between it and the materialistic philosophy attributed to the Lokayatikas. As a matter of fact, it is from such a point of view that the Jaina commentator Silamka wanted to equate the two.

> Silamka says that there is but little difference between the Lokayata and the Sankhya, for though the Sankhyas admit souls, these are absolutely incapable of doing any work, and all the work is done by the *prakriti*, which is potentially the same as the gross elements, the body and the so-called mind is therefore nothing but the combination of the gross elements, and the admission of separate *purusas* is only nominal. Since such a soul cannot do anything and is of no use (*akincitkara*), the Lokayatas flatly deny them.[126]

Interestingly, Samkara's own writings betray a somewhat similar understanding of the proximity in the philosophical positions of the Sankhya and the Lokayata. Apart from the fact that his refutation of the Sankhya was by far a refutation of the materialistic philosophy (and therefore his claim that any real status given by the Sankhya philosophers to the principle of the *purusa* idealistically understood is bound to create internal inconsistencies for Sankhya), we find him representing the Sankhya philosophers as citing the authority of the Lokayata in defence of their thesis that activity could belong only to the non-intelligent *pradhana*:

> For this very reason, namely, that intelligence is observed only where a body is observed while it is never seen without a body, the Lokayatikas consider intelligence to be a mere attribute of the body. Hence activity belongs only to what is non-intelligent.[127]

If there is any truth in this representation of the Sankhya standpoint, it would be wrong for us to imagine any fundamental difference between the Sankhya and the Lokayata materialism.

However, the clearest proof of the materialistic nature of original Sankhya consists in the nominal status of the *purusa* in it. Some of the modern scholars, too, have noted this. Garbe[128] summed up their views:

[126] Dasgupta HIP iii. 527.
[127] SBE xxxiv. 368.
[128] ERE xi. 191.

What place, however, in a system which maintains such views is to be found for the soul (*purusa*)? Strangely enough, former scholars who made exhaustive investigations into the Sankhya system did not succeed in answering this question. They regard the soul in this system as entirely superfluous, and hold that its founder would have shown himself more logical if he had altogether eliminated it.

Garbe himself tried to read a real status of the *purusa* in original Sankhya. We shall examine his view later and see why the older view rejected by him was on the whole more correct. For the present we may consider certain evidences discussed by Dasgupta which appears to justify our understanding of the materialistic character of original Sankhya.

According to Dasgupta,[129] Caraka's treatment of the philosophy 'represents the earliest systematic doctrine of the Sankhya.' Caraka's work was much older than the *Karika*. The Sankhya, as treated in the *Karika*, does not appear to be a materialistic philosophy because of the peculiarly idealistic conception of the *purusa* in it. The *purusa* in the *Karika* meant the Self as pure consciousness and though the doctrines of the *pradhana, parinama* and *purusa bahutvam* were not really abandoned by its author, the whole process of the development of the visible world was viewed by him as designed to serve the purpose of 'enjoyment and liberation' of the *purusa*. If such a conception of the *purusa* be there, the system can hardly appear to be a materialistic one. Thus it was primarily because of Isvarakrisna's interpretation of the *purusa* that the Sankhya did not appear to be a full fledged materialistic philosophy to the majority of the modern scholars. But do we come across the same understanding of the *purusa* in the older version of the Sankhya as preserved in Caraka? It is here that Dasgupta has special importance for us:

According to Caraka there are six elements (*dhatus*), viz. the five elements such as *akasa* (empty space), *vayu* (air), etc. and *cetana* (consciousness) called also *purusa*. From other points of view, the categories may be said to be twenty-four only, viz. the ten senses (five cognitive and five conative), *manas* (mind), the five objects of senses and the eight-fold *prakriti* (*prakriti, mahat, ahamkara*, and the five elements).[130]

Thus we have here two alternative angles of looking at the Sankhya. According to the first, the *purusa* or consciousness (*cetana*) is simply on par with the five well-known material elements, i.e., is itself a form of material element (*dhatu*). The peculiarly materialistic nature of this standpoint is obvious. In

[129] HIP i. 217. [130] *Ib.* i.213.

the second alternative, too, the standpoint is overtly materialistic. For everything in this list of twenty-four categories—including the ten organs and the mind—are, from the Sankhya view, essentially material. That is, the list has no place for any spiritual principle at all. The concept of the *purusa* is absent in it. This absence was so conspicuous that Cakrapani,[131] the commentator on Caraka, found it necessary to invent some explanation for it: 'the *prakriti* and the *purusa* both being unmanifested the two together have been counted as one.' Such an explanation, if true to the real spirit of Caraka, amounts to a denial of any independent status to the *purusa*. Dasgupta,[132] evidently depending on Cakrapani, explained this version of the Sankhya thus:

> Caraka identifies the *avyakta* (the unmanifested) part of the *prakriti* with the *purusa* as forming one category. The *vikara* or evolutionary products of the *prakriti* are called *ksetra*, whereas the *avyakta* part of the *prakriti* is regarded as the *ksetrajna*. This *avyakta* and *cetana* are one and the same entity. From this unmanifested *prakriti* or *cetana* is derived the *buddhi* (intellect) and from *buddhi* is derived the ego (*ahamkara*) and from the *ahamkara* the five elements and the senses are produced, and when this production is complete, we say that creation has taken place. At the time of *pralaya* (periodical cosmic dissolution) all the evolutes return back to the *prakriti*, and thus become unmanifest with it, whereas at the time of a new creation from the *purusa*, the unmanifest (*avyakta*), all the manifested forms—the evolutes of *buddhi*, *ahamkara*, etc.—appear.

If this interpretation be correct, then according to Caraka's understanding of the Sankhya the *purusa* becomes only a part of the *prakriti*, i.e., the principle of consciousness as potentially contained in the primeval matter.

Whether this was the standpoint of original Sankhya cannot be asserted with certainty, though evidences mentioned by Dasgupta favour such a view. Caraka spoke of only twenty-four categories, whereas, presumably under the influence of Isvarakrisna, we are accustomed to think of the Sankhya as a system of twenty-five categories, the *purusa* being the twenty-fifth. However, a passage in the *Mahabharata* clearly indicates that there was an older version of the system that acknowledged only twenty-four categories and certain other passages of the epic implied a materialistic understanding of the *purusa* itself. Here are the evidences as collected by Dasgupta:[133]

[131] *Ib*. i. 213 n. [132] *Ib*. i. 214-5.

[133] *Ib*. i. 217-8. It must not, however, be imagined that Dasgupta accepted a materialistic view of the Sankhya. With what consistency it is difficult to judge, he favoured a theistic view of the original Sankhya.

In the *Mahabharata* (xii.318) three schools of the Sankhya are mentioned, viz. those who admitted twenty-four categories (the school I have sketched above), those who admitted twenty-five (the well-known orthodox Sankhya system) and those who admitted twenty-six categories. This last school admitted a supreme being in addition to the *purusa* and this was the twenty-sixth principle. This agrees with the orthodox Yoga system and the form of the Sankhya advocated in the *Mahabharata.* The schools of the Sankhya of twenty-four and twenty-five categories are here denounced as unsatisfactory. Doctrines similar to the school of the Sankhya we have sketched above (i.e., Caraka's Sankhya) are referred to in some of the other chapters of the *Mahabharata* (xii.203, 204). The Self apart from the body is described as the moon of the new moon day; it is said that as Rahu (the shadow of the sun during an eclipse) cannot be seen apart from the sun, so the Self cannot be seen apart from the body. The Selfs (*saririnah*) are spoken of as manifesting from the *prakriti.*

The view quoted last suggests a theory of the Self reminiscent of the Lokayatika. Was it because Samkara knew this older Sankhya that he made it quote the authority of the Lokayata? Did the relic of such a view of the Self form the basis of the proofs for the plurality of the *purusas* even in the *Karika?*

At least one point is clear. As evidenced by the *Caraka Samhita* and certain passages of the *Mahabharata,* we are led to admit that there was a version of the Sankhya older than the one we come across in the *Karika,* in which the principle of the *purusa* was understood in a materialistic sense. Therefore, the *Karika* understanding of the *purusa* as pure consciousness was not a feature of early Sankhya. We are thus left with two alternatives. Either it was an invention of Isvarakrisna himself, or it was borrowed by him from some other philosophical source.

We are going to argue in favour of the second alternative. Our grounds are two-fold.

First, it is possible for us to reconstruct the history of the development of this idealistic conception of the *purusa* among the followers of the Vedic path, i.e., among the circle of philosophers who were originally hostile to the Sankhya. This shows that the understanding of the *purusa* as the eternally detached pure consciousness was an inherent feature of the Vedantic thought and as such, if found in a treatise on the Sankhya, it must be looked upon as being borrowed from the Vedantists.

Secondly, this conception, as introduced by Isvarakrisna into the Sankhya, created very gross logical inconsistencies within the system and could be reconciled with the Sankhya only by surrendering its fundamentals.

The history of the development of the conception of the *purusa* as pure consciousness can be satisfactorily traced among the followers of the Vedic tradition. Such a development, further, could not have been accidental. The pastoral economy of the early Vedic people brought into vogue an outlook of male-domination and, since *purusa* literally meant the male, it is here that we expect to find the principle of the *purusa* raised to an exalted philosophical status. Secondly, the vast literatures from the *Samhitas* down to the Upanisads give us a connected picture of the development of the idealistic principle of pure consciousness itself. It is therefore in later phases of this tradition that we find the originally male-dominated outlook fused with the idealistic outlook, i.e., the principle of the *purusa* made to stand for the ultimate reality conceived as pure consciousness. And since original Sankhya was positively opposed to the Vedic tradition, it will not be logical to imagine that the interpretation of the *purusa* as pure consciousness was an original feature of it.

We shall now follow the history of the development of the concept of the *purusa* in the Vedic tradition. It will help us to understand the real standpoint of original Sankhya, negatively though.

Belvalkar and Ranade[134] have already drawn our attention to the fact that even in the comparatively later portions of the Vedic literatures, the word *purusa* meant only the human being. Criticising the usually accepted etymology of the word they observed:

> These etymologies do not inform us as to the original meaning of the term which is more clearly brought out by certain ritualistic and other statements made about him in the *Brahmanas* like *Satapatha*, vi. 2.2.9. (seventeen is the *purusa*, as consisting of ten *pranas*, four limbs—the hands and the feet—the trunk the fifteenth, the neck the sixteenth and the head the seventeenth); *Aitareya*, ii.4. (quintuple is the *purusa* as constituted from out of hair, skin, flesh, bone and marrow); *Tandya*, xxiii. 14.5 (*purusa* is twenty, for there are ten fingers to the hand and ten to the feet); or *Taittiriya Samhita*, vi.4.5.7 (three amongst the beasts grasp by the hand, *hasta*, namely man or *purusa*, elephant and monkey). This clearly shows that *purusa* originally denoted the human being with his peculiar bodily structure, and not any inner or spiritual entity in-dwelling therein.

What the authors have not sufficiently taken note of is the circumstance that in spite of there being so many words distinctly meaning the human being, these sources chose the word

134 HIP ii. 427-8.

specifically meaning the male (as contrasted with the female) to refer to the human being. Presumably, the explanation is that because of their pastoral economy the Vedic people were so highly patriarchal that the terms male and human became almost interchangeable.

We have already seen how, in the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda,* there appeared the tendency to raise the *purusa* to the exalted status of the cosmic principle from which the universe originated. Eventually, when the idealistic outlook fully emerged in the Vedanta or the *Upanisads* and the ultimate reality was viewed as pure consciousness itself, there arose, logically enough, the tendency to identify the *purusa* with this pure consciousness or Brahman. Many examples of this may be quoted from the *Upanisads.*

In order to identify the *purusa* with pure consciousness, it was first of all necessary to divest it of its former human implications. 'There is a *purusa* who is non-human (*a-manava*)', said the *Chandogya Upanisad,*[135] and it said it over and over again, 'There is a *purusa* who is non-human (*a-manava*). He leads them on to the Brahma. This is the way leading to the gods.'[136]

Once divested of the human associations, there was no difficulty in identifying it with pure consciousness or the Self. A very good example of this tendency is to be found in the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad*:

> This earth is honey for all creatures and all creatures are honey for this earth. This shining immortal *purusa* who is in this earth, and, with reference to oneself, this shining immortal *purusa* who is in the body—he, indeed, is just this soul (*atman*), this Immortal, this Brahma, this All.[137]

What is meant by 'honey' here? Commentators[138] interpreted it as follows:

> The earth and all living beings are mutually dependent, even as bees and honey are. The bees make the honey and the honey supports the bees.

Similarly, the earth supports all creatures and all creatures support the earth. And the *Upanisad* was trying to show that behind all these correlatives there is the shining immortal *purusa* which is Brahman or the Self. So the *Brihad Aranyaka* passage continued:

> These waters are honey for all things and all things are honey for waters. This shining immortal *purusa* who is in these waters,

135 iv. 15.5.
136 v. 10.2.
137 ii.5.1. Hume 102.
138 Radhakrishnan PU 202.

and, with reference to oneself, this shining immortal *purusa* who is made of semen—he is just this Soul, this Immortal, this Brahma, this All.

This fire is honey for all things and all things are honey for this fire. This shining immortal *purusa* who is in this fire, and, with reference to oneself, this shining immortal *purusa* who is made of speech—he is just this Soul, this Immortal, this Brahma, this All.[139]

After similarly reviewing how the shining immortal *purusa* is behind the wind, the sun, the quarters of heaven, the moon, the lightning, the thunder, the space, the law (*dharma*) and the truth, the passage concluded:

This Soul (*atman*) is honey for all things, and all things are honey for this soul. This shining immortal *purusa* who is in this soul, and, with reference to oneself, this shining immortal *purusa* who exists as soul—he is just this Soul, this Immortal, this Brahma, this All.

Verily this soul is overlord of all things, the king of all. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this soul all things, all gods, all worlds, all breathing things, all these selves are held together.[140]

The identification of the *purusa* with the ultimate reality is clear and since the ultimate reality was conceived as Brahman or the self or pure consciousness, the *purusa* itself became the principle of consciousness. This is the history of the development of the concept of the *purusa* in the Vedic tradition.

It is not logical to find the same sort of development of the concept of the *purusa* in the agricultural-matriarchal tradition, the ideological offshoots of which were the Tantra and the Sankhya. The reason is simple. The male, in this tradition, was secondary only. Nevertheless, the fact is that whatever might have been the form of original Sankhya, there was in it the principle of the *purusa*, because we do not come across any version of the system which did not mention this principle. Therefore the question is, why did the early Sankhya philosophers at all conceive of such a principle and what did it originally stand for?

A clue to this is perhaps to be found in the *Caraka Samhita* itself. Dasgupta's understanding of Caraka is based, as we have said, on Cakrapani's commentary. We find in this the theories of creation and dissolution. But there were commentators on Caraka older than Cakrapani and they understood Caraka's passage in a somewhat different way. Instead of creation and dissolution, they thought that Caraka was merely speaking of birth and death.[141] The difference is significant, for the older

[139] ii.5.2-3. Hume 102. [140] ii.5.14-5. Hume 103-4.
[141] Dasgupta HIP i. 215 n.

understanding indicates that the basic philosophical categories of the Sankhya were rooted in human analogy. Perhaps a relic of this older understanding was retained even in Gaudapada's commentary on the *Sankhya Karika,* according to which, 'as the birth of a child proceeds from the union of the male and the female, so the production of creation results from the union of the *prakriti* and the *purusa.*' From this point of view, the characterisation of the *prakriti* or the *pradhana* in the *Karika*[142] as *prasava dharmi* (one that gives birth to) might have been something more than a mere metaphor. If original Sankhya was trying to understand the cosmic processes of creation and dissolution on the analogies of human birth and death, it might have been that the view of evolution was originally suggested to the Sankhya philosophers on the analogy of the fœtal development. It is from this point of view, again, that the continuity of original Sankhya with Tantra becomes clear to us.

All these imply that the *prakriti* and the *purusa* of original Sankhya also meant the female and the male. This point is important, for it may help us to understand the problem of the anomalous position of the *purusa* in original Sankhya.

Evidently the term *prakriti* was not the invention of the early Sankhya philosophers because it was the basic concept of Tantrism, the history of which is traced back to a very remote antiquity. And it is impossible to deny that the *prakriti* originally stood for the female principle without questioning the Indian cultural tradition fundamentally. It was also the term for *sakti,* the more concrete manifestations of which were the mother goddesses. In Tantrism the human body, particularly the female body, was understood as the microcosm of the universe and as such the *prakriti* became also a cosmic principle. It is from this point of view that the universe in Tantrism is conceived as *vamodbhuta,* born of the female. The greatness of the early Sankhya philosophers could only be that they expressed in a new form, abstract and objective, the fundamental ideas of the *prakriti,* which was apprehended in original Tantrism in the form of the concrete primitive myth. The change was significant. For it was not simply a question of revolutionising the *form* of the primitive thought, but also of introducing the germs of a new *content.* For in presenting it in the form of an abstract and objective principle, the early Sankhya philosophers had con-

[142] 11.

sciously to reject the idea of any god or creator and to define the *prakriti* as the non-spiritual or material (*acetana*) potential of the concrete material world. We shall return later to examine the principle of the *prakriti* or the *pradhana* in greater detail. For the moment, we may try to see how far, even when stated in the form of an abstract and objective philosophical principle, the original implication of femininity was still retained in the term.

Surprisingly enough, the *Sankhya Karika* and even the *Sankhya Sutra* are not without its relics. Thus, for example, in the *Karika*,[143] the *prakriti* is compared to a dancing girl:

> Just as a dancing girl, after showing her performances desists from dancing, so does the *prakriti* desist, after exhibiting herself to the *purusa*.

Two more couplets of the *Karika*[144] were explained by Gaudapada on the basis of this analogy of the dancing girl. Even in the *Sankhya Sutra*,[145] the *prakriti* was compared to the dancing girl (*nartakivat*). The analogy is strange and the usually accepted interpretation of it does not throw much light on the real position of the Sankhya. On the other hand, in view of the facts that in the early phases of social development dancing was definitely a magical act and the original germs of the Sankhya are to be traced to very early times, it may not be groundless to presume that the analogy of the dancing girl could have originally been something more than a mere analogy; that is, it might have had some ritual significance, the precise nature of which can be understood only when we have a fuller knowledge of ancient Indian matriarchy and its characteristic rituals. Such a presumption becomes stronger in view of a somewhat similar but equally obscure reference in the *Karika*:[146]

> I think there is nothing more tender (*sukumara*) than the *prakriti*; once 'seen' (*drista*) by the *purusa* she does not become the object of being 'seen' again.

Gaudapada's interpretation of this is obviously fanciful. It is evident from his explanation that, according to the Sankhya, God is the creator of the world. Other interpretations of the passage are not more satisfactory. It is not improbable, therefore, that the *Karika* contained here a reference to some ancient matriarchal ritual overlooked by the commentators. In this con-

143 59.
144 65, 66.
145 iii.69.
146 61.

nection it is useful to remember what a contemporary philosopher, Krisnacandra, said:

> There is so much (in the Sankhya texts) that is clothed in poetical or mystic garb on which the commentators do not help us much but which are suggestive enough to tempt us to construct the system anew.

What we propose to add is that a study of the ancient matriarchal rituals will help such reconstruction.

We may be yet far from understanding the real meaning of the reference to the dancing girl or of being *seen* on the part of the *prakriti*. But one point should be fairly clear. The essential femininity of the *prakriti* was not washed away even in the *Karika* version of the Sankhya. Interestingly, Vijnana Bhiksu,[147] in one of his elementary works called the *Sankhya Sara*, mentioned the word *sakti* as a synonym for *prakriti*. Another well-known synonym for *prakriti* was *maya* (in a sense opposite to the Vedanta) and it is suggested that the word was derived from the root *ma*, to measure.[148] Obviously, it is the same root that gave Sanskrit the word, 'mother.' The other commonly used synonym for *prakriti* is *aja*, the unborn female, and this reminds us of the refernce to the Sankhya view in the *Svetasvatara Upanisad*:[129]

> With the one unborn female, red, white, and black,
> Who produces many creatures like herself,
> There lies the one unborn male taking his delight.
> Another unborn male leaves her with whom he has
> had his delight.

This evidence is decisive. It is therefore impossible not to agree with the following:

> According to the Sanskrit grammar, the word *prakriti* is in the feminine gender. But the synonyms for it, like *avyakta* or *pradhana* are not so. In Sanskrit, however. the gender of a word does not indicate the sex of the object referred to. In these cases, too, the gender of the words used cannot be the main consideration. There is no doubt that the object referred to by these words was definitely conceived as female.[150]

Now about the term *purusa*. That it originally stood for the male can be disputed only if we deny the early Sankhya philosophers the credit of a deliberate selection of terminology. For this is the literal meaning of the word and if the propounders of the system preferred to use it, they knew what they were doing. In other words, if they did not want *purusa* to mean the

[147] Colebrooke SK 68.
[148] *Ib.*
[149] iv. 5. Hume 403.
[150] Bhattacarya *BDS* (B) 149.

male, they could have easily found another word to express what they really wanted to indicate. The *Karika*, however, infused into the word implications much removed from this primary one. Yet the original masculine sense was not totally lost to it. We find such words as *puman*[151] and *pumsah*[152] (meaning, the male) used in the *Karika* as substitutes for *purusa*.

And this principle, originally meaning the male, had a peculiarly anomalous position in the Sankhya. Even in the *Karika*[153] it is conceived as the 'witness, solitary, bystander, spectator and passive,' and all these not in the Vedantic sense: the passive spectator of the Sankhya was the spectator of an essentially real world-process.

Remembering, therefore, that the *prakriti* and the *purusa* originally meant the female and the male, we may now look into the living ethnological domain for a clue to this anomalous position of the *purusa* in original Sankhya.

'The Khasis have a saying, *from the woman sprang the clan*.'[154] Similarly, 'the Chinese word for the clan-name means *born of a woman*.' and the modern scholars have interpreted this as evidence of mother-right in ancient China.[155] It is not difficult to see why mother-right should produce sayings like these. 'The father has no kinship with his children, who belong to their mother's clan.'[156] He is thus considered an alien, a mere visitor. 'In Jowai he neither lives nor eats in his wife's house, but *visits* it only after dark.'[157] 'This does not leave much scope for the man. As a husband he is a *stranger* to his wife's people, who refer to him curtly as a *begetter*.'[158]

This gives us some idea of the anomalous position of the *purusa* in mother-right. On the one hand, at least at a comparatively developed stage of the knowledge of human reproduction, the fact was recognised that the male had to *visit* the female and be united with her to ensure human reproduction. On the other hand, since he had no claim to real paternity, he was considered as just an alien and as such utterly unimportant. So he was curtly referred to as the 'begetter.'

This anomalous position of the *purusa* is reflected in the Sankhya. On the one hand, presumably because of an extension of the Tantrika tendency to understand the mystery of the uni-

151 11.
152 60.
153 19.
154 Thomson SAGS .i 153.
155 ERE viii. 858.
156 Gurdon K xix.
157 *Ib.*
158 Thomson SAGS i. 153.

verse on human model, the early Sankhya philosophers must have imagined that just as a child was born as a result of union of the male and the female, so was the universe a result of the union of the *purusa* and the *prakriti*. On the other hand, just as the child in the matriarchal society has no real kinship with the father, so the universe, in spite of being real, has no real relationship with the *purusa*. Hence the anomalous status of the *purusa* in a system, known to the early orthodox idealists as essentially the doctrine of the *pradhana*. The principle of the *purusa* was there in original Sankhya, although we do not clearly see why should it at all have been there. Evidently, there were more factors than the individual inclinations of the early philosophers that were responsible for this. The social structure reflected in this philosophy left for the *purusa* only an anomalous position.

How far the same social system can provide a clue to the understanding of the doctrine of the multiplicity of the *purusa* (*purusa bahuttvam*), is not an impermissible question. The presumption is that a more detailed knowledge of mother-right in ancient India may throw some light on it. But we cannot enter into this question here. Rather, we want to point out that this anomalous position of the *purusa* in original Sankhya remained its greatest weakness; it provided an easy opportunity to the later thinkers to introduce alien ideas into the system. This is exemplified by the *Karika*.

Original Sankhya must have been immensely old. Accepting Garbe's chronology, we have to assume a large time-gap between it and the *Karika*. During this period—though in the circle of thinkers directly opposed to original Sankhya (i.e., among the Vedantists)—the concept of the *purusa* underwent its own course of development, culminating in the distinctly idealistic principle of Self as pure consciousness. The author of the *Karika*—and more conspicuously the later writers on the Sankhya as Gaudapada, Aniruddha and Vijnana Bhiksu—tried their very best to introduce this concept of the *purusa* into the Sankhya system and thus virtually to make a Vedanta of it. We shall confine ourselves particularly to the *Karika*, as the real affiliation of these later writers to the Vedantic standpoint is well-known, whereas the claim that the version of the Sankhya in the *Karika* was already contaminated by Vedantic thought might be questioned.

Is there any ground for suspecting the authenticity of the

Karika? It is after all the earliest available text on the system and, if the *purusa* here means the Self or Consciousness, should not the presumption be that this was how the *purusa* had been understood in original Sankhya? Of course Gunaratna drew a distinction between the original Sankhya and the later Sankhya. But we have no direct evidence of what the *purusa* meant in the former. We might have possibly known it, had the more ancient treatises on the system like the *Sasti Tantra* and the *Atreya Tantra* been available to us. In the absence of such evidences, is it not logical for us to rely on the evidence of the earliest text we possess?

Our answer is in the negative. It is true that we do not have any evidence of a decisive character against the *Karika* version of the *purusa* which may be considered as either direct or external. Nevertheless, we have evidences against it which, though circumstantial and internal, are no less decisive in nature. We shall begin with the internal evidences.

The *Karika* view of the *purusa* could be looked upon as forming an appropriate feature of original Sankhya, had it not introduced gross inconsistencies within the text itself. An unbiased study of the *Karika* gives one the impression that its author, after introducing a virtually Vedantic view of the *purusa* into the system, did not clearly know what to do with it, i.e., how to reconcile it with the fundamental tenets of the system. The only way in which he could ultimately effect this reconciliation was by surreptitiously surrendering the original tenets. That most of the modern scholars, like the best-known traditional commentators, have overlooked this peculiarity of the text, is possibly explained by their affiliation to the idealistic (often specifically Vedantic) standpoint. The nearer the author of the *Karika* approached the Vedanta, surrendering the fundamentals of the Sankhya, the more did the system appear to them internally consistent and philosophically acceptable. Eventually, the significance of the fact is almost forgotten that Badarayana, the first philosopher to systematise the Vedantic outlook, looked upon the Sankhya as representing the strongest opposition to it, and Samkara, the ablest commentator on Badarayana, found the *Karika* view of the *purusa* as utterly irreconcilable with the fundamentals of the Sankhya.

By the fundamentals of the system we mean the following: (1) The doctrine of the *pradhana*, i.e., primeval matter is the ultimate cause of the visible world; (2) The view of causality

known as *parinamavada,* i.e., the effect is a *real modification* of the cause; and (3) The doctrine of the plurality of the *purusas.* That these were really the fundamentals of the system is evidenced by the *Brahma Sutra,* where the refutation of the Sankhya is specifically a refutation of these doctrines. Even the author of the *Karika* found it impossible to deny all these to the Sankhya standpoint. Where he failed, however, was to show how these could be really reconciled to the conception of the *purusa* as detached consciousness.

Elaborate arguments are not necessary to prove that the *Karika* conception of the *purusa* was practically the same as the Vedantic view of the Self. Like the *sakti* of the Vedanta, the *purusa* of the *Karika* is bare witness.[159] It is the pure knower or *jna,*[160] like the *vijnata* of the *Upanisads.* It is absolutely opposite in nature to the primeval matter (*prakriti* or *avyakta*) and its evolutes (*vyakta*),[161] and as such, it alone is the principle of pure consciousness: the consciousness which appears to belong to certain things of the visible world is ultimately nothing but the consciousness of the *purusa* reflected therein.[162] And so on. There is no difference between such a view of the *purusa* and the Vedantic conception of the Self. However, when this Vedantic conception was introduced by Isvarakrisna into the Sankhya as standing for the principle of the *purusa,* it became irreconcilable with the fundamentals of the system. We may begin with the *Karika* proofs for the existence of the *purusa.*

The *pradhana* is real and the visible world is a real modification (*parinama*) of this *pradhana.* As a matter of fact, it is from the reality of the visible world that the reality of the *pradhana* was inferred by the *Sankhya*: *karyatah tat upalabdhih,*[163] as the *Karika* put it. Interestingly, this same visible world was taken of as proof for the existence of the *purusa*:

> Since the assemblage of sensible objects is for another's use; since the converse of that which has the three *gunas* with other properties (before mentioned) must exist; since there must be superintendence (*adhisthana*); since there must be one to enjoy; since there is a tendency to abstraction (*kaivalyartham pravritteh ca*: since also there is the desire to be detached from the world); therefore, *purusa* is.[164]

These are the proofs offered by the *Karika* for the existence

[159] 19. [160] 2.
[161] 11 [162] 20. [163] 8.
[164] 17.

of the *purusa* and we are going to argue that they carry the germs of at least the major contradictions in the *Karika*.

Following are the expositions of the proofs:

1. The *purusa* must exist because *the assemblage of objects is for another's use*. As Gaudapada[165] explained the argument:

In like manner as a bed, which is an assemblage of bedding, props, cords, cotton, coverlid, and pillows, is for another's use, not for its own; and its several component parts render no mutual service; thence it is concluded that there is a man who sleeps upon the bed, and for whose use it was made: so this *body*, which is an assemblage of the five elements, is for another's use; or, there is soul (*purusa*) for whose enjoyment this enjoyable *body*, consisting of an aggregate of intellect and the rest, has been produced.

Perhaps, the word *body*, in this commentary, should have been replaced by the word *nature* (the visible world including the human body) to give a more precise understanding of the standpoint of the *Karika;* for, the other references in the text make it clear that the *assemblage of objects* meant nature. It may be noted that the same argument occurs also in the *Sankhya Sutra*[166] and the commentator Vijnana Bhiksu explained *samhata* (assemblage) as *prakriti karya sadharana*, i.e., the effects of the *prakriti* in general. So the essence of the argument is that the things of the visible world, being of the nature of assembled objects, presuppose an enjoyer thereof, which must be the *purusa*.

But the question is why the enjoyer, thus presupposed, should specifically be the *purusa*? The answer to this question forms the content of the next argument.

2. The enjoyer presupposed cannot be the *prakriti* or its evolutes, all these being themselves assemblages of parts, being essentially composed of three *gunas*. Therefore something which is converse in nature to the *prakriti* and its evolutes can alone be the enjoyer of these and the *purusa* alone is such. Therefore *purusa* must exist. The same argument occurs also in the *Sankhya Sutra*[167]

3. The *purusa* must exist, *because there must be superintendence*. Gaudapada[168] explained the argument thus: 'As a charioteer guides a chariot drawn by horses able to curvet, to prance, to gallop, so the soul guides the *body*.' Again, the word *body* here should possibly be substituted by the word *nature*, for that is the sense of the other references to the same theme occurring in the *Karika*. And Gaudapada himself quoted the

165 Colebrooke SK 55.
166 i.66.
167 i.141.
168 Colebrooke SK 55-6.

authority of the *Sasti Tantra*,[169] which according to him, declared that the *pradhana*, as mounted by the *purusa*, prevailed (*pravartate*). Besides, the same argument, with the same implication, is also to be found in the *Sankhya Sutra*.[170]

4. The *purusa* must exist, *because there must be an enjoyer*. This is practically a repetition of the first argument. Even Gaudapada[171] interpreted it on similar lines:

In like manner as there must be some one to partake of food flavoured with sweet, sour, salt, pungent, bitter, and astringent flavours, so, as there is no capacity of fruition (*bhoktritva bhava*, lit., tendency to enjoyment) in intellect and other products of nature (*prakriti*), there must be soul (*atma*) by which this body is to be enjoyed.

Exactly the same argument is to be found in the *Sankhya Sutra*.[172]

5. The *purusa* must exist, *because* (as Colebrooke translated the *Karika*) *there is a tendency to abstraction*. The actual word in the text, rendered here as 'abstraction' is *kaivalya*, loneliness. Said Gaudapada:[173]

Kaivalya is the abstract noun, derived from *kevala*, 'sole, only', —for, on account of, that (abstraction); the practice of it: from the exercise of (or tendency to) abstraction (for the sake of its own separation or detachment) it is inferred that soul is. That is, *every* one, whether wise or unwise, equally desires imperishable release from succession of worldly existence.

Vijnana Bhiksu, commenting on the same argument as occurring in the *Sankhya Sutra*,[174] made the point clearer: *Kaivalya* is 'absolute extirpation of pain.' In short, the argument is that since there is an urge for liberation, there must exist the *purusa* which alone can have this urge. But the question is, what is it from which the *purusa* thus wants to be liberated? Apparently, from the worldly bondage, i.e., from the fetters of the *prakriti* and its evolutes; for, in the *Karika* list of twenty-five *tattvas* there is nothing excepting these outside the *purusa* and *purusa* itself cannot be the cause of its own bondage.

Thus are the five proofs in the *Karika* explained. It remains for us to ask one question: Since all these proofs have reference to the *prakriti* and its evolutes, what is the understanding of the relationship between the *purusa* and the *prakriti* upon which the proofs are based? Apparently, there is no simple answer to this

169 On *SK* 17.
170 i. 142.
171 Colebrooke SK 56.
172 i. 143.
173 Colebrooke SK 56.
174 i. 144.

question; the underlying understanding does not appear to be uniform. Three distinct shades in it are clearly discernible:

(*a*) The relation between the *purusa* and the *prakriti* is that of the enjoyer and the enjoyed. The *purusa* is the enjoyer of the *prakriti* and its evolutes.

(*b*) It is the relation between the guide and the guided. The *purusa* guides the *prakriti* and superintends the evolutionary process.

(*c*) It is the relation between the bound and that which binds. The *purusa* wants to be detached from the *prakriti* and its evolutes and thereby attain a kind of solitude which is liberation.

All these understandings are there in the *Karika*. And Samkara's writings make it clear how the author of the text had to contradict himself in order to maintain all these positions along with the view of the *purusa* as detached spectator and also the fundamental tenets of the Sankhya, viz. the doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama*. In examining these contradictions we may follow the writings of Samkara. We shall first take up the argument concerning superintendence (*adhisthana*).

According to the *Karika*, the existence of the *purusa* is presupposed by the modifications of the *prakriti*, for these modifications cannot take place without superintendence and the *prakriti* cannot superintend its own modifications. However, if the *prakriti* be real and the visible world a real modification of it, this superintendence, too, needs to be looked at as essentially real. But superintendence, being a form of activity, cannot be really attributed to the *purusa*, the passive spectator. As the *Karika*[175] admitted, activity can belong only to the *prakriti* and it is only because of its association with the *prakriti* that the 'stranger' (*purusa*) is falsely imagined as active. The author of the *Karika*[176] wanted to evade the difficulty of making the passive *purusa* superintend over the *prakriti's* modifications on the basis of the well-known analogy of the halt and the blind. But the analogy cannot be really satisfactory, because, if taken seriously enough, it amounts to a surrender of the fundamentals of the Sankhya. As Samkara[177] said,

> Well then—the Sankhya resumes, endeavouring to defend his position by parallel instances—let us say that, as some lame man devoid of the power of motion, but possessing the power of sight,

[175] 20. [176] 21.
[177] On *Br. Su.* ii.2.7. SBE xxxiv. 373.

having mounted the back of a blind man who is able to move but not to see, makes the latter move; ... so the soul moves the *pradhana*. Thus also, we reply, you do not free your doctrine from all shortcomings; for this your new position involves *an abandonment of your old position, according to which the* pradhana *is moving of itself,* and the (indifferent inactive) soul possesses no moving power.

Besides, the superintendence of the halt over the blind is not really speaking a passive process.[178] Therefore, as Samkara showed, if the Sankhya philosopher wanted logically to stick to the view of the *purusa* as a purely passive spectator, it was impossible for him to find any logical explanation of the modifications of the *prakriti*.

Beyond the *pradhana* there exists no external principle which could either impel the *pradhana* to activity or restrain it from activity. The soul (*purusa*), as we know, is indifferent, neither moves to, nor restrains from action. As therefore the *pradhana* stands in no relation, it is impossible to see why it should sometimes modify itself into the great principle (*mahat*) and sometimes not.[179]

Also, as Samkara[180] went on arguing, if this doctrine of passive superintendence be really accepted, liberation would become impossible on the Sankhya view: 'The permanency of such capability would imply the impossibility of final release.' In short, to be consistent, the Sankhya philosophers have to accept either of the two positions. First, the superintendence of the *purusa* is there but it is not to be taken in the real sense. That is, the modification of the *prakriti*, in the ultimate analysis, is itself unreal. But this will no longer be the position of the Sankhya, because it will be the position of the Vedanta. As Samkara[181] said, 'The activity or non-activity (by turns) of the lord, on the other hand, are not contrary to reason, on account of his ... being connected with the power of illusion (*maya*).' This is self-consistent idealism, which the Sankhya, without surrendering its fundamental tenets of the *pradhana* and *parinama*, could not obviously accept.

The other alternative was to remain consistent to the materialistic position based on the principles of the *pradhana* and *parinama* and, in order to remain true to it the Sankhya philosophers had to view the modifications of the *prakriti* as due to *svabhava* or natural law rather than the superintendence of the *purusa*. Besides, one of the constituents of the *prakriti* being

178 *Ib.*
179 On *Br. Su.* ii.2.4. SBE xxxiv. 370.
180 On *Br. Su.* ii.2.7. SBE xxxiv. 374.
181 On *Br. Su.* ii.2.4. SBE xxxiv. 370-1.

rajas, or the potentials for activity, why should the Sankhya philosophers at all think of explaining the activities or the modifications of the *pradhana* as depending upon the passive influence of the *purusa?* Obviously, had the Sankhya philosophers agreed to remain true to this original materialistic position and avoided the deceptive suggestion of Isvarakrisna, it would have been impossible for Samkara to bring in the charge of internal inconsistency against them, whatever might have been the other possible objections of the self-conscious idealist against the position of the self-consistent materialists.

But the fact is that the author of the *Karika* did not follow any of these alternatives. He was trying in many ways to make room within the doctrine of the *pradhana* for the principle of the *purusa* in the sense of pure consciousness and thus made the Sankhya system grossly inconsistent. This becomes all the more clear in the case of his argument concerning the enjoyment or *bhoktritva.* Repeatedly did he assert that the entire process of the modification of the *prakriti* was to serve the purpose of enjoyment of the *purusa.*

> The instruments (*karanas,* i.e., the internal and external organs, themselves the evolutes of the *prakriti*), perform their respective functions incited by mutual invitation (*akuti,* craving, incitement to activity). The soul's (*purusa's*) purpose is the motive: an instrument is wrought by none.[182]

We have here a strange kind of juxtaposition of the materialistic principle of *svabhava* with the idealistic principle of the soul: the evolutes of the *prakriti* acted according to their own *akuti* and did not owe any impetus to anything outside themselves (contrast the view of the superintendence of the *purusa*) and yet the motive of their activities was to serve the purpose of the soul. This was hardly consistent. More inconsistent, however, was the repeated claim of the *Karika* that the whole process of evolution was meant to serve the purpose of the *purusa,* by which was sometimes meant the enjoyment on the part of the *purusa,* sometimes again, the liberation of the *purusa.* Here are some examples:

> Generous nature (*prakriti*), endowed with qualities, does by manifold means *accomplish, without benefit (to herself) the wish of the ungrateful soul* (*anupakarinah purusah*), devoid as he is of qualities (*a-guna*).[183]
>
> The instruments characteristically different from each other, and variously affected by qualities, present to the intellect (*buddhi,*

[182] *SK* 31. [183] 60.

itself a product of the *prakriti*) *the soul's whole purpose*, enlightening it (*buddhi*) as a lamp.[184]

Since it is intellect (*buddhi*) which accomplishes *soul's fruition of all which is to be enjoyed,* it is that, again, which discriminates between the chief principle (*pradhana*) and soul.[185]

For the *sake of soul's wish,* that subtile person exhibits (before it), like a dramatic actor, through relation of means and consequence, with the aid of nature's (*prakriti's*) influence.[186]

And so on. The central point is that, according to the *Karika,* the evolution of the *prakriti* is meant to serve the purpose of the *purusa.* This contention naturally gave rise to gross self-contradictions within the Sankhya. What needs to be said on this had already been stated by Samkara.[187]

If the spontaneous activity of the *pradhana* has, as you say, no reference to anything else, it will have no reference not only to any aiding principle, but also to any purpose or motive, and consequently your doctrine that the *pradhana* is active in order to effect the 'purpose of man, (*purusartha,* lit., the purpose of the *purusa*) will become untenable. If you reply that the *pradhana* does not indeed regard any aiding principle, but does regard a purpose, we remark that in that case we must distinguish between the different possible purposes, viz. either enjoyment (on the part of the soul), or final release, or both. If enjoyment, what enjoyment, we ask, can belong to the soul which is naturally incapable of any accretion (of pleasure or pain)? Moreover, there would in that case be no opportunity for release. If release, then the activity of the *pradhana* would be purposeless, as even antecedently to it the soul is in the state of release; moreover, there would then be no occasion for the perception of sounds etc. If both, then, on account of the infinite number of objects of the *pradhana* to be enjoyed (by the soul), there would be no opportunity for final release. Nor can the satisfaction of a desire be considered as the purpose of the activity of the *pradhana;* for neither the non-intelligent *pradhana* nor the essentially pure soul can feel any desire.

If, finally, you should assume the *pradhana* to be active, because otherwise the power of sight (belonging to the soul on account of its intelligent nature) and the creative power (belonging to the *pradhana*) would be purposeless; it would follow that, as the creative power of the *pradhana* does not cease at any time any more than the soul's power of sight does, the apparent world would never come to an end, so that no final release of the soul could take place.

It is, therefore, impossible to maintain that the *pradhana* enters on its activity for the purposes of the soul.

These are the contradictions in which the *Karika* got involved in trying to introduce a Vedantic conception of the *purusa* into the Sankhya and to relate it to the *pradhana* as the enjoyer thereof. There is no half-way house between material-

[184] 36. [185] 37. [186] 42.
[187] On *Br. Su.* ii.2.6. SBE. xxxiv. 372-3.

ism and idealism. If you look at the *pradhana* as the original cause of the visible world and consider the visible world to be a real modification (*parinama*) of the *pradhana*, there would hardly be any logical status in your system for the principle of pure consciousness as either the superintendent or the enjoyer of the world process. If, on the other hand, you want to stick seriously to this principle of pure consciousness, you have to abandon the doctrine of the *pradhana* and its *parinama* and look at the world-process as ultimately unreal. This is the position of the Vedanta and it is interesting to see how Isvarakrisna, in connection with his view of liberation, gradually moved towards such a view. We may begin with some of his typical formulations:

This evolution of nature (*prakriti*), from intellect to the special elements, is performed *for the deliverance of each soul respectively;* done for another's sake as for itself.[188]

As it is a function of milk, an unintelligent (substance), to nourish the calf, so it is the office of the chief principle (*pravrittih pradhanasya*, the desire of the *pradhana*) *to liberate the soul.*[189]

As people engage in acts to relieve desires, so does the undiscrete principle *to liberate the soul.*[190]

All these give us the impression of an unconscious teleology: the whole process of the evolution of the *prakriti* is designed to fulfil a purpose—the liberation of the soul. We can easily see why it is difficult for the Sankhya philosopher to maintain this view consistently with his other theses. First, in order to uphold this view, it is necessary to surrender the theory that the evolution of the *prakriti* is meant for the enjoyment of the *purusa*. It is a serious point to be surrendered, because it amounts to abandoning two of the most important proofs for the very existence of the *purusa*. Secondly, this theory of unconscious teleology is internally inconsistent. For liberation presupposes bondage and the only cause of bondage, from the *Karika* standpoint, can be the *prakriti* and its evolutes. How can, therefore, the evolution of the *prakriti* be the cause of bondage of the *purusa* and at the same time 'have the purpose' of liberating the *purusa*? Thirdly, if the *prakriti* be real and the evolution of the visible world a real process, then the bondage of the *purusa*, too, becomes real and its liberation, therefore, logically impossible. As Samkara[191] argued:

But perhaps you (the Sankhyas) will say that, after all, suffer-

[188] 56.
[189] 57.
[190] 58.
[191] on Br. Su. ii. 2.10. SBE xxxiv. 380-1.

ing (on the part of the soul) is real. In that case, however, the impossibility of release becomes all the more undeniable, especially as the cause of suffering (viz. the *pradhana*) is admitted to be eternal. — And if (to get out of this difficulty) you maintain that, although the potentialities of suffering (on the part of the soul) and of causing suffering (on the part of the *pradhana*) are eternal, yet suffering, in order to become actual, requires the conjunction of the two—which conjunction, in its turn, depends on a special reason, viz. the non-discrimination of the *pradhana* by the soul—and that hence, when that reason no longer exists, the conjunction of the two comes to an absolute termination, whereby the absolute release of the soul becomes possible. We are again unable to accept your explanation, because that on which the non-discrimination depends, viz. the *guna* called Darkness (*tamas*, one of the three constituents of the *prakriti*), is acknowledged by you to be eternal. And as there is no fixed rule for the (successive) rising and sinking of the influence of the particular *gunas*, there is also no fixed rule for the termination of the cause which effects the conjunction of the soul and the *pradhana* (i.e., non-discrimination); hence the disjunction of the two is uncertain, and so the Sankhyas cannot escape the reproach of the absence of final release resulting from their doctrine.

Samkara rightly pointed out that the only logical view of liberation, consistent with the conception of the Self as pure consciousness, is to be found in the Vedanta, according to which the bondage of the Self, though empirically real is ultimately unreal, as the phenomenal world itself is such:

To the Vedantin, on the other hand, the idea of final release being impossible cannot occur in his dream even, for the Self he acknowledges to be one only, and one thing cannot enter the relation of subject and object, and Scripture, moreover, declares that the plurality of effects originates from speech only. For the phenomenal world, on the other hand, we may admit the relation of sufferer and suffering just as it is observed, and need neither object to it nor refute it.[192]

Could it have been possible for the author of the *Karika* to accept such a position? Obviously not. At least so long as he was not prepared to surrender the doctrine of the *pradhana* and viewed the phenomenal world as the product of Nescience or Ignorance (*avidya*), that is, so long as he refused to agree to consider the bondage of the *purusa* as ultimately unreal. Samkara[193] had already argued out this point:

And if you should say that the soul *suffers as it were* because it leans towards the *sattva-guna*, we point out that the employment of the phrase, *as it were*, shows that the soul does not realy suffer. If it is understood that its suffering is not real, we do not object to the phrase '*as it were*.' For the amphisbena also does not become venomous because it is a *serpent as it were* ('like a serpent'), nor does the serpent lose its venom because it is 'like an amphisbena.' You must therefore admit that the relation of causes of suffering and of sufferers, is not real but the effect of Nescience.

[192] *Ib*. SBE xxxiv. 381. [193] *Ib*. SBE xxxiv. 379-80.

Samkara rightly added that there was practically no difference between this and the Vedantic position. In short, therefore, only by surrendering the fundamentals of the Sankhya and by virtually accepting the position of the Vedanta, could the author of the *Karika* (or any later Sankhya philosopher like him) logically defend the doctrine of liberation, upon which, incidentally, depended a vital proof for the existence of the *purusa* in Isvarakrisna's version of the Sankhya.

Amazingly enough, the *Karika* did ultimately move towards such a position. It retained the doctrine of the *purusa*, though at the cost of the fundamentals of the Sankhya.

> Verily not any *purusa* is bound, nor is released nor migrates; but the *prakriti* alone, in relation to various beings, is bound, is released, and migrates.[194]

Commented Gaudapada:[195]

> For soul is of its own nature loosened, and goes everywhere and how therefore should it migrate?—migration being for the purpose of obtaining something not previously obtained. The phrases, therefore,—soul is bound, soul is loosened or migrates—originate in ignorance of the nature of migration. From knowledge, the end of soul and existence, the real nature of soul is attained. That being manifest, soul is single, pure, free, fixed in its own nature.

This could have formed part of any genuine Vedantic text. However, that was the position to which even the author of the *Karika* was himself moving:

> So, through study of principle, the conclusive, incontrovertible, only one knowledge is attained, that neither I AM, nor is aught mine, nor do I exist.[196]

Explained Wilson:[197]

> By these expressions, therefore, however quaint or questionable, we are not to understand negation of the soul. This would be a direct contradiction to its specification as one of the categories of the system, one of the twenty-five essential and existent principles. It is merely intended as a negation of the soul's having any active participation, any individual interest or property, in human pains, possessions, or feelings. *I am, I do, I suffer,* mean material nature, or some of her products, (substantially), is, does, or suffers; and not the soul, which is unalterable and indifferent, susceptible of neither pleasure nor pain, and only reflecting them, as it were, or seemingly sharing them, from the proximity of nature, by whom they are really experienced: for soul, according to the *Vedas,* is absolutely existent, eternal, wise, true, free, unaffected by passion, universal.

Wilson did not ask himself: How far such a view, though consistent with the position of the Vedanta, could really be

194 62.
195 Colebrooke SK 147.
196 64.
197 Colebrooke SK 151.

reconciled with the doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama*? The participation of the Self in the phenomenal world could be considered unreal—and as such the illusion of such participation could be dispelled by knowledge—only when the phenomenal world along with its proximity to the Self became utlimately unreal. Had the *Karika* really moved towards such a position, the only implication would be that it surrendered the fundamentals of the Sankhya in the interests of the conception of the Self borrowed from the Vedanta. This is further evidenced by the following:

> Possessed of this (self-knowledge) the soul contemplates, at leisure and at ease, the *prakriti* which now gets debarred from prolific change (*nivritti prasavam prakritim*[198]).

That is, with the attainment of self-knowledge on the part of the *purusa*, the evolutionary process of the *prakriti* ceases to be real. This is, however, logically conceivable only when the evolutionary process as a whole is viewed as the result of ignorance (*avidya*) rather than *svabhava* or the laws inherent in the *prakriti*. This is plainly surrendering the Sankhya to the Vedanta. Isvarakrisna was in fact doing this:

> When separation of the informed soul from its corporeal frame at length takes place, and *nature in respect of it ceases*, then is absolute and final deliverance accomplished.[199]

To sum up: The *Karika* conception of the *purusa* was irreconcilable with the fundamentals of the Sankhya, because it was really speaking the Vedantic view of the Self to which the fundamentals of the Sankhya were originally opposed. It was, therefore, only by tacitly surrendering the fundamentals of the Sankhya that Isvarakrisna could finally defend his view of the *purusa*. That is, in defence of his view of the *purusa*, he virtually converted the Sankhya into Vedanta, the *parinama vada* into *vivarta vada*.

There is another interesting feature of this conversion of original Sankhya into disguised Vedanta which, though not to be clearly found in the *Karika* itself, becomes obvious in the writings of Gaudapada and in the *Sankhya Sutra*. It is the transformation of the original doctrine of the plurality of the *purusas* (*purusa bahutvam*) into that of the non-duality of the *purusa*, without which, the surreptitious conversion could not be complete.

[198] *SK* 65. [199] 68.

In the eleventh verse of the *Karika*, the author tried to specify the properties of the *prakriti* in its pre-evolute (*avyakta*) state and in its evolutes (*vyakta*), and added that the *purusa* did not possess the properties that were common to the *avyakta* and the *vyakta;* it possessed only properties peculiar to the former. Gaudapada found in this an excellent opportunity to surrender the doctrine of the plurality of the *purusas*. He argued that since the *vyakta* was multitudinous (*aneka*) and the *avyakta* single or solitary (*eka*), and since the *purusa* had the quality that differentiated the *avyakta* from the *vyakta*, the purusa, too, must have been *eka* or single. This logic clearly is in flat contradiction to the doctrine of the plurality of the *purusas* which, as we have seen, even the author of the *Karika* laboriously defended. Even the *Sankhya Sutra*[200] echoed his argument.

Gaudapada's position, therefore, seemed somewhat peculiar to the modern scholars. Some of them tried to justify him though not in a convincing manner. Wilson,[201] for example, stated:

> Either, therefore, Gaudapada has made a mistake, or by his *eka* is to be understood, not that soul in general is one only, but that it is single or several, in its different migrations or, as Mr. Colebrooke renders it, *individual*.

At the same time he realised that such an ingenious interpretation of Gaudapada could not stand because the doctrine of there being only one soul was patently Vedantic.

> The multiplied existence of the soul is in special contradiction to the doctrine of Vedantists, of the universality of one supreme soul of the world, from which all human souls are derived, as in such texts as these: 'one only existent soul is distributed in all beings; it is beheld collectively or dispersedly, like the reflection of the moon in still or troubled water. Soul, eternal, omnipresent, undisturbed, pure, one, is multiplied by the power of delusion, not of its own nature.' This is undoubtedly the doctrine of the *Vedas* and the Sankhya teachers, who profess to receive those works as authority, are obliged to interpret the texts unfavourable to their dogmas in a peculiar manner.[202]

What the author apparently forgot is that the original Sankhya philosophers had really no anxiety to interpret their views in conformity with the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads*, for they must have been as much opposed to the Vedanta as the early Vedantists were opposed to them. It was only the later philosophers, the disguised Vedantists, who showed any such anxiety. Thus, for example, the author of the *Sankhya Sutra*,[203]

200 i. 149.
201 Colebrooke SK 41.
202 *Ib*. 59.
203 i. 154.

with his proof of the plurality of the *purusas,* was trying inconsistently to reconcile it with the Vedantic view of the non-duality of the *purusa*:

> There is no contradiction (of this doctrine of many *purusas*) with the scriptural (Vedic) declaration of the non-duality (of the Self), because of the comprehensiveness of genus (*jatiparatvat*).

That is, the soul, considered as genus, is but one; its nature and properties are common to all souls. Such a soul, though individual, becomes manifold because of its connections with aggregate, the products of nature. And Vijnana Bhiksu, as is only to be expected, tried his best to rationalise this standpoint further. Notwithstanding all these, the fact remains that the Sankhya theory of the plurality of the *purusas* was clearly opposed to the Vedantic view of the non-duality of the Self, and as such, the effort to make the former consistent with the latter was simply a manoeuvre to bring original Sankhya along Vedantic lines.

We may now sum up our arguments concerning the place of the *purusa* in original Sankhya.

(1) Sankhya was originally the doctrine of the *pradhana* or the *prakriti* because the early Vedantists refuted it as such.

(2) In spite of this, it had within it a place for the *purusa,* though this place must have been highly anomalous. The origin of this anomalous position of the *purusa* in a system which was essentially the doctrine of the *pradhana* can presumably be traced to the anomalous position of the male in the matriarchal society. This presumption becomes valid in view of the circumstance that original Sankhya was a more explicit philosophical statement of the theoretical assumptions implicit in Tantrism, while Tantrism, in its turn, is to be traced to matriarchal conditions, as Chanda and others already argued. And if this presumption be true, we have to admit that whatever might have been the original meaning of the *purusa* in the Sankhya, it could never have been the detached consciousness or the Self of the Vedanta.

(3) This view of the *purusa* as detached consciousness developed outside the circle of the Sankhya philosophers, chiefly among the Vedantists.

(4) The principle of the *purusa,* however insignificant might have been its importance in original Sankhya, and whatever might have been its original meaning, remained the Achilles' Heel of the philosophy. In comparatively later times, when

some of the philosophers were trying to transfuse Vedantic contents into Sankhya, they naturally saw that the easiest way to do this was to take the principle of the *purusa* in the sense in which the Vedanta philosophers interpreted it. The process, as far as the available data allow us to conjecture, began very early, even as early as the *Mahabharata*; for, the version of the Sankhya we come across in the *Mahabharata* was already cast into an idealistic and spiritualistic mould. With Isvarakrisna, this process became even more glaring. However, it remained for Samkara, the highly conscious idealist philosopher, to show that this extremely idealistic conception of the Self was bound to remain ever irreconciled with the materialsitic essence of original Sankhya, as evidenced particularly by the doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama*. Thus in Samkara we come across, on the one hand, concentrated attack on these fundamental doctrines of the Sankhya, while, on the other hand, a clear demonstration of the contradictions in the standpoint of the Sankhya philosopher who tried to accept the Vedantic view of the Self without surrendering the original doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama*. Isvarakrisna himself ultimately preferred to save the Vedantic conception of the *purusa* by surrendering the doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama*. In doing this, however, he converted the Sankhya into a sort of disguised Vedanta, leaving us to wonder why, if this version of the Sankhya was true to its original form, the earliest systematiser of the Vedanta view should have at all found in the Sankhya the strongest opposition to his own standpoint.

We may now clearly see what Samkara meant when he said that he had no quarrel with the Sankhya philosophers in so far as they maintained the view of the Self as free from all qualities, i.e., as detached consciousness. He knew only too well that the acceptance of such a view amounted to a plain surrender of the fundamentals of the Sankhya in favour of the Vedanta; why should he have quarrelled with the Sankhya philosophers if they agreed to do it? But Samkara clearly understood that there was no way of reconciling this view of the *purusa* with the doctrines of the *pradhana* and *parinama*, the hangovers of original Sankhya in the *Karika* version. That was why his refutation of the Sankhya was primarily a refutation of the doctrine of the *pradhana*, i.e., the doctrine of an unconscious or material first cause and the development of the visible world from it as a real process.

8. The Origin of the Sankhya

That in spite of the *Karika*—the earliest available text on the Sankhya system—it is necessary to reconstruct the original form of the Sankhya is not saying anything new. Eminent modern scholars like Oldenberg, Jacobi, Dahlmann and, even Garbe have made attempts in this direction. These attempts have been summed up by Belvalkar and Ranade.[204]

Oldenberg refused to believe that the Sankhya could have been propounded as a perfect system by some individual philosopher and then handed down through centuries practically intact and unaltered. What usually took place in the case of the ancient systems was that the rudiments suggested by some thinkers in the remote antiquity were worked out by succeeding thinkers into full-fledged systems.

> This leads to a retracing of the steps and a partial modification of the earlier premises in the light of the difficulties suggested, which at times leads even to a bifurcation of the original system into two or more schools.[205]

According to Oldenberg, this is what happened to the Sankhya: original Sankhya bifurcated into two distinct philosophies, called by Oldenberg the 'Epic Sankhya' and the 'Classical Sankhya.' By the former he meant the version of the Sankhya as found in the *Mahabharata,* particularly in the *Srimat Bhagavat Gita,* while by the latter the version of the Saṇkhya as found in the *Karika.* These were the two independent lines along which, according to Oldenberg, 'original' Sankhya developed and both the lines were self-consistent. But if this were really so, where are we to look for an outline of the 'original' unbifurcated Saṇkhya itself? Oldenberg answered that the rudiments of this 'original Sankhya was to be found in the *Upanisads,* particularly in the *Katha* and the *Svetasvatara Upanisads,* and more specifically in the first chapter of the latter. And since, in his view, the beginnings of original Sankhya was to be traced to the *Upanisads,* Oldenberg was not prepared to think that original Sankhya was anti-Vedic or anti-Upanisadic.

Let us first take the assumption that the rudiments of the Sankhya could be found in the *Upanisads,* because other scholars,[206] too, have considered that possibility seriously. Apart from the *Katha* and the *Svetasvatara,* certain passages of the *Prasna*

204 HIP ii. 412-24.
205 *Ib.* ii. 419.
206 E.g. Dasgupta HIP i. 211.

and the *Maitri Upanisads* are claimed to hold the rudiments of the Sankhya. Of course, Jacobi suggested that if it was at all possible to find the beginnings of the Sankhya in the *Upanisads,* we should rather take up a passage of the *Chandogya,* which somehow or other foreshadowed a similar view. This proposal may be taken up later as it would be more fruitful to discuss it in connection with Jacobi's views.

Here is the list of the Upanisadic passages wherein the germs of the Sankhya are said to be found: *Katha Upanisad*: i.3. 10 & 11; ii.3. 7 & 8; *Svetasvatara Upanisad*: i.8; i.10; iii.12; iv. 5; iv. 10; v. 2; v. 7; v. 8; vi. 10; vi. 13; vi. 16; *Prasna Upanisad*: iv. 8. And also certain passages of the *Maitri Upanisad.*

We may now quote the standard translation of these passages and see how far, in the context of what we have already discussed, these can actually be accepted as holding the germs of the Sankhya.

From the *Katha*:

Higher than the senses are the objects of sense.
Higher than the objects of sense is the mind (*manas*);
And higher than the mind is the intellect (*buddhi*).
Higher than the intellect is the Great Self (*atma mahan*).
Higher than the Great is the Unmanifest (*avyakta*).
Higher than the Unmanifest, however, is the person (*purusa*)
Higher than the person (*purusa*) is nothing at all.
That is the goal. That is the highest course.[207]

Higher than the senses (*indriya*) is the mind (*manas*);
Above the mind is the true being (*sattva*).
Over the true being is the Great Self (i.e., *buddhi,* intellect);
Above the Great is the Unmanifest (*avyakta*).
Higher than the Unmanifest, however, is the person (*purusa*),
All-pervading and without any mark (*a-linga*) whatever,
Knowing which, a man is liberated
And goes to immortality.[208]

From the *Svetasvatara*:

That which is joined together as perishable and imperishable,
As manifest and unmanifest—the Lord (*Isa,* Potentate) supports it all.
Now, without the Lord the Soul (*atman*) is bound, because of being an enjoyer;
By knowing God (*deva*) one is released from all fetters.[209]

What is perishable, is Primary Matter (*pradhana*).
What is immortal and imperishable, is Hara (the 'Bearer', the Soul).
Over both the perishable and the Soul the One God (*deva*) rules.

207 Hume TPU 352.
208 *Ib.* 359.
209 *Ib.* 395.

By meditation upon Him, by union with Him, and by entering
into His Being
More and more, there is finally cessation from every illusion
(*maya nivritti*).[210]

A Mighty Lord (*prabhu*) is the person (*purusa*),
The instigator of the Highest Being (*sattva*)
Unto the purest attainment,
The ruler, a light imperishable.[211]

With the one unborn female, red, white, and black,
Who produces many creatures like herself,
There lies the one unborn male taking his delight.
Another unborn male leaves her with whom he has had his
delight.[212]

Now, one should know that Nature (*prakriti*) is illusion (*maya*),
And that the Mighty Lord (*mahesvara*) is the illusion-maker
(*mayin*).
This whole world is pervaded
With beings that are parts of Him.[213]

(Even) the One who rules over every single source,
All forms and all sources;
Who bears in his thoughts, and beholds when born,
That red (*kapila*)[214] seer who was engendered in the beginning.[215]

Whoever has qualities (*guna*, distinctions) is the doer of deeds
that bring recompense;
And of such action surely he experiences the consequence.
Undergoing all forms, characterised by the three qualities
(*gunas*), treading the three paths,
The individual self roams about according to its deeds
(*karman*).[216]

He is of the measure of a thumb, of sun-like appearance,
When coupled with conception (*samkalpa*) and egoism
(*ahamkara*).
But with only the qualities of intellect and of self,
The lower (self) appears of the size of the point of an awl.[217]

The One God who covers himself.
Like a spider, with threads
Produced from Primary Matter (*pradhana*), according to his
own nature (*svabhavatas*)—
May he grant us entrance in Brahma![218]

210 *Ib*. 396. 211 *Ib*. 401.
212 *Ib*. 403. 213 *Ib*. 404.
214 Note on the word *kapila* by Hume: 'The reference may be to the sage Kapila, the founder of the Sankhya philosophy. But in the similar stanza iv. 12 (Cf. also iii 4) the reference is clearly to the Demiurge, Hiranyagarbha, 'the Golden Germ'.'..Hume TPU 406.
215 Hume TPU 405. 216 *Ib*. 407.
217 *Ib*. 218 *Ib*. 409.

Him who is the constant among the inconstant, the intelligent among the intelligences,
The One among many, who grants desires,
That Cause, attainable by discrimination and abstraction (*sankhya-yoga*)—
By knowing God, one is released from all fetters.[219]

He who is the maker of all, the all-knower, self-sourced,
Intelligent, the author of time, possessor of qualities, omniscient
Is the ruler of Primary Matter (*pradhana*) and of the spirit (*ksetrajna*), the lord of qualities (*guna*),
The cause of reincarnation (*samsara*) and of liberation (*moksa*), of continuance and of bondage.[220]

From the *Prasna*:

As birds resort to a tree for a resting-place, even so, O friend, it is to the Supreme Soul (*atman*) that everything here resorts: Earth and the elements (*matra*) of earth, water and the elements of water, heat (*tejas*) and the elements of heat, wind and the elements of wind, space and the elements of space, sight and what can be seen, hearing and what can be heard, smell and what can be smelled, taste and what can be tasted, the skin and what can be touched, speech and what can be spoken, the hands and what can be taken, the organ of generation and what can be enjoyed, the anus and what can be excreted, the feet and what can be walked, mind (*manas*) and what can be perceived, intellect (*buddhi*) and what can be conceived, egoism (*ahamkara*) and what can be connected with 'me', thought (*citta*) and what can be thought, brilliance (*tejas*) and what can be illumined, life-breath (*prana*) and what can be supported.

Truly, this seer, toucher, hearer, smeller, taster, thinker (*mantri*), conceiver (*boddhri*), doer the conscious self (*rvijnana atman*), the person—his resort is in the Supreme Imperishable Soul (*Atman*, Self).[221]

It is not necessary to quote the passages of the *Maitri Upanisad* as its central point is not different. Besides, the text being comparatively of a later date, even those who claim to discover the embryonic elements of the Sankhya in the *Upanisads,* do not attach any great importance to them.

We may now look critically at these passages and see how far these may be considered as indicative of original Sankhya. That we come across here terminologies which are distinctly Sankhya cannot be doubted. There are, moreover, obvious references to views that are typically Sankhya. However, it does not follow that they reveal the rudiments of the Sankhya. For, references to a philosophcial view, along with the terminology distinctive to it, may as well be *for the purpose of refuting it* and it is not difficult to see that the references to the Sankhya in the Upani-

[219] *Ib.* 410. [220] *Ib.* [221] *Ib.* 386-7.

sadic passages could have had no other purpose.

Higher than the *avyakta* (*prakriti*) is the *purusa* and higher than the *purusa* is nothing at all, said the *Katha Upanisad.* Higher than the *avyakta,* repeated the text, is the *purusa,* knowing which, a man is liberated. Do we have here a statement of the Sankhya or its *refutation*? There can be only one answer to this question if we bear in mind that the Sankhya, as evidenced by the refutation of the system in the *Brahma Sutra,* had originally been only the doctrine of the *pradhana* (*avyakta*) and the place of the *purusa* in it had been secondary (*apradhana* and in fact *udasina* or the indifferent). In fact, if the *prakriti* (*avyakta* or primeval matter) were not the primary principle in original Sankhya, it would be inexplicable why the system should have deliberately chosen the term *pradhana,* the primary, to refer to it. The chief tendency of the Upanisadic texts, however, was to make this primeval matter of original Sankhya utterly unimportant and, in the ultimate analysis, even illusory. Thus, when the *Svetasvatara* declared that the One God produced, from the *pradhana*—but in fact out of His own nature (*svabhavatas*), and, therefore, like a spider,—everything that exists, the view was obviously designed to establish the thesis that the One God was the final cause, the Ultimate Reality. And if this were so, the *pradhana*'s part in the production of the visible world would become only apparent. As the text said, the One God 'is the maker of all, the all-knower, self-sourced, intelligent, ... omniscient, the ruler of the *pradhana* and the *ksetrajna,* the lord of all the *gunas.*' Thus the causality attributed by the Sankhya to the *pradhana* became illusory. As the text said, 'one should know that the *prakriti* is illusion (*maya*) and the Mighty Lord is the illusion-maker (*mayin*).' This is certainly the position of the Vedanta, though with a theistic bias that might support Ramanuja's understanding of the philosophy.

The point to be specially noted is that the Vedanta was not expounded here without any reference to the Sankhya. Rather, we find here a distinct effort to establish the Vedanta on the ruins of the Sankhya. This shows that the orthodox exponents of the philosophy of the *Upanisads,* as Badarayana and Samkara, unlike some of the modern scholars, knew the philosophical traditions better. Mere textual understanding was enough for them to realise that the Sankhya could not be justified by the passages from the *Upanisads;* the former simply represented the most important philosophical opposition to the

latter. In other words, a critical study of the Upanisadic texts in which Oldenberg and others discovered the roots of the Sankhya, only reveals that like Badarayana and others (who, in later times, refuted the Sankhya in defence of the *Upanisads*), the authors of the *Upanisads* were themselves trying to achieve the same end, though in their own way.

To sum up: there is little possibility of substantiating Oldenberg's claim that original Sankhya is to be found in the *Upanisads.* And if this be so, his further claim that this Upanisadic Sankhya eventually bifurcated into Epic Sankhya and Classical Sankhya becomes even less plausible. We have already discussed the reasons that led to the argument that the so-called Classical Sankhya of Oldenberg, i.e., the version of the system which we come across in the *Karika,* was substantially the result of clumsy imposition upon the Sankhya, the cardinal theme of the Vedanta. The so-called Epic Sankhya, i.e., the overtly spiritualistic philosophy called the Sankhya in the *Mahabharata* (particularly in the *Gita*), represented a complete surrender of the basic principles of the Sankhya.

What Oldenberg and others overlooked is the thoroughly anti-Vedic character of original Sankhya. Misled by the later ideas that accepted the Sankhya within the folds of orthodoxy, they forgot that the earlier exponents of real orthodoxy, i.e., Badarayana and his commentators, condemned it primarily for its anti-Vedic and anti-Vedantic spirit. As is only to be expected, scholars like Garbe, who rightly made this anti-Vedic character of original Sankhya their starting point, avoided the pitfall of trying to discover the roots of the Sankhya in the well-known passages of the *Upanisads* and the *Mahabharata.* Such passages are, according to Garbe,[222] the result of deliberate *contamination* of genuine Sankhya ideas with Upanisadic philosophy.

> The original Sankhya came indeed to be perverted in the *Svetasvatara,* the Epic, and the *Bhagvat Gita* and, later still, in the theistic Yoga and the several sectarian and Vedanta-coloured *puranas.*[223]

Some of the later exponents of the system, according to him, in seeking to enlist the support of the Brahmanic Scriptures and to placate orthodoxy, were trying to justify the Sankhya on the basis of isolated Vedantic texts and were even prepared to suffer

222 Belvalkar & Ranade HIP ii. 414. 223 *Ib.* ii. 415.

doctrinal modifications. They were thus subscribing to certain Vedantic doctrines like the value of prescribed religious practices as a preparation towards the *summum bonum*, or the *nitya suddha mukta* (eternally pure and liberated) nature of the *atman;* they were attempting to postulate, on the analogy of the Yoga doctrine, three grades in *viveka* (discrimination) and, above all, they were conceding the all-pervading character of the Self or the *Atman*. Nevertheless, modifications like these remained ever extrinsic to the true spirit of the Sankhya.

But the question is: what, according to Garbe, were the fundamental tenets of original Sankhya? His answer listed the following: the absolute separation of the material and the spiritual principles; the independence and indestructibility assigned to the material principle called the *prakriti* or the *pradhana*, having the three constituents called *sattva, rajas* and *tamas;* the ordered process and sequence of the evolution of the world from the *prakriti;* the denial of God; the peculiar epistemological doctrine of knowledge as a merely mechanical process illumined by the spiritual power of the soul; the doctrine of the *linga sarira* or the subtle transmigrating body; and lastly, the belief in salvation through *viveka* or the discrimination between the *prakriti* and the *purusa*.

There is no doubt, as Belvalkar and Ranade[224] pointed out, all these tenets are to be found in the *Karika* and, as such, Garbe's view of original Sankhya amounted to its equation to the *Karika* version. And it is here that his analysis fails to be logical. It is true that the Vedantic principle of the *purusa* was there in the *Karika;* nevertheless, as we have already seen, it could not be logically reconciled to the fundamental tenets of original Sankhya. Therefore, features of the *Karika*-version of the Sankhya that followed from the Vedantic principle of the *purusa* must have been extrinsic to original Sankhya and the most prominent of these features was the doctrine of liberation as illumination or knowledge. The only conclusion which all these lead to is that original Sankhya must have been some form of archaic materialism.

It is here that Jacobi's view[225] of original Sankhya has considerable interest for us. He was probably the only modern scholar who drew our attention to the possibility of the Sankhya being a development of an archaic materialism. He agreed

224 *Ib.*

225 *Ib.* ii. 416.

with Garbe in regarding the Sankhya as pre-Buddhistic in origin and also in looking at the Epic Sankhya (i.e., the Sankhya of the *Mahabharata* and the *Gita*) as a hybrid combination of Classical Sankhya (i.e., the Sankhya of the *Karika*) and the Vedanta. Where he differed from Garbe, however, was in his assertion of the existence of an incipient 'pro-Classical' Sankhya, the possibility of which Garbe totally denied. Interestingly, this original or pre-Classical Sankhya, according to Jacobi, did not, like the Classical one, have an exclusively metaphysical purpose; it had a practical purpose, addressed, as it was, to the masses rather than to the trained dialecticians. We are thus lured to ask: Was original Sankhya a *lokayata* philosophy in the dual senses in which we have tried to understand it? Jacobi would not perhaps agree to an affirmative answer. Nevertheless, there are certain distinct hints in his own views that need be taken into account. One of these is that the incipient pre-Classical Sankhya must have been some form of archaic materialism.

It is important to discuss this point in particular because, apart from its relevance for our understanding of original Sankhya, it throws some unexpected light on the question of the origin of the idealistic outlook in ancient Indian philosophy.

Starting with the idea that original Sankhya must have been a form of materialism, Jacobi looked through the *Upanisads* for some passage that might have foreshadowed such an outlook. He found one in the *Chandogya*.

It relates the story of Svetaketu Aruneya seeking the source of highest wisdom from his father.

The father began:

> Just as, my dear, by one piece of clay everything made of clay may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name, the reality is just 'clay.'
>
> Just as my dear by one copper ornament everything made of copper may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name, the reality is just 'copper'.
>
> Just as, my dear, by one nail-scissors everything made of iron may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just 'iron.'
>
> So, my dear, is that teaching.[226]

There is a tendency here to seek one fundamental principle behind everything and this fundamental principle is called *sat*, i.e., Being or Existence:

[226] Hume TPU 240-1.

In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being (*sat*), one only, without a second. To be sure, some people say: 'In the beginning this world was just non-Being (*a-sat*) one only, without a second; from that non-Being Being was produced.'

But verily, my dear, whence could this be? ... How from non-Being could Being be produced? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was just Being, one only without a second.

It bethought itself: 'Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself!' It emitted heat. That heat bethought itself: 'Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself.' It emitted water. Therefore whenever a person grieves or perspires from the heat, then water (i.e., either tears or perspiration) is produced.

That water bethought itself: 'Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself.' It emitted food. Therefore, whenever it rains, then there is abundant food. So food for eating is produced just from water.[227]

And the discussion continued:

Now, of these beings here there are just three origins: (there are beings) born from an egg, born from a living thing, born from a sprout.

That divinity (i.e., Being) bethought itself: 'Come! Let me enter these three divinities (i.e., heat, water and food) with this living soul (*atman*), and separate out name and form.

'Let me make each one of them threefold.' That divinity entered into these three divinities with this living soul, and separated out name and form.

It made each of them threefold.

Now, verily, my dear, understand from me how each of these three divinities becomes threefold.[228]

Whatever red form fire has, is the form of heat; whatever white, the form of water; whatever dark, the form of food. The firehood has gone from fire: the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name. The reality is just 'the three forms.'

Whatever red form the sun has, is the form of heat; whatever white, the form of water; whatever dark, the form of food. The sunhood has gone from the sun: the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name. The reality is just 'the three forms.'[229]

And so on about the moon, the lightning, etc. It was, in short, the wisdom of the ancients that whatever appeared red was the form of heat, whatever appeared white was the form of water, whatever appeared dark was the form of food. These three, upon reaching man becomes threefold:

Food, when eaten, becomes divided into three parts. That which is its coarsest constituent, becomes the feces; that which is medium, the flesh; that which is finest, the mind.

Water, when drunk, becomes divided into three parts. That which is its coarsest constituent, becomes the urine; that which is medium, the blood; that which finest, the breath (*prana*).

Heat, when eaten, becomes divided into three parts. That which

[227] *Ib*. 241.
[228] *Ib*. 241-2.
[229] *Ib*. 242.

is its coarsest constituent, becomes bone; that which is medium, the marrow; that which is finest, the voice.

For, my dear, the mind consists of food; the breath consists of water; the voice consists of heat.[230]

Of coagulated milk, my dear, when churned, that which is the finest essence all moves upward; it becomes butter.

Even so, verily, my dear, of food, when eaten, that which is the finest essence all moves upwards; it becomes the mind.

Of water, my dear, when drunk, that which is the finest essence all moves upward; it becomes the breath.

Of heat, my dear, when eaten, that which is the finest essence all moves upward; it becomes the voice.

For, my dear, the mind consists of food; the breath consists of water; the voice consists of heat.[231]

Emphasis here is laid on the view that the mind consisted of food and nothing but food. The proof offered is quite interesting:

The father, Uddalaka Aruni, told the son Svetaketu Aruneya: 'A person, my dear, consists of sixteen parts. For fifteen days do not eat; drink water at will. Breath, which consists of water, will not be cut off from one who drinks water.' So Svetaketu did not eat for fifteen days, went to the father and asked, 'What shall I say, Sir?' Uddalaka asked him to recite the *Vedas*. The son said, 'Verily, they do not come to me, sir.' The father explained, 'Just as, my dear, a single coal of the size of a fire-fly may be left over from a great kindled fire, but with it the fire would not thereafter burn much—so, my dear, of your sixteen parts of a single sixteenth part may be left over, but with it you do not now apprehend the *Vedas*. Eat, then you will understand from me.' Then Svetaketu ate and approached the father. Then whatever the father asked him, he answered. The father explained it thus: 'Just as, my dear, one may, by covering it with straw, make a single coal of the size of a fire-fly that has been left over from a great kindled fire blaze up, and with it the fire would thereafter burn much—so, my dear, of your sixteen parts a single sixteenth part has been left over. After having been covered with food, it has blazed up. With it you now apprehend the *Vedas*; for, my dear, the mind consists of food, the breath consists of water, the voice consists of heat.' And Svetaketu understood.[232]

But the real purpose of the whole discourse was to go beyond these principles of heat, water and food and arrive at the fundamental reality behind everything—the finest essence of everything, the Being:

On this point, my dear, understand that this (body) is a sprout which has sprung up. It will not be without a root.

What else could its root be than food? Even so, my dear, with food for a sprout, look for water as the root. With water, my dear, as a sprout, look for heat as the root. With heat, my dear, as a sprout, look for Being as the root. All creatures here, my dear,

230 *Ib.* 243. 231 *Ib.*
232 *Ch. Up.* vi 7.1-5.

have Being as their root, have Being as their home, have Being as their support....

... That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is reality (*satya*). That is *atma* (soul). That are thou, Svetaketu.[233]

In the remaining part of this chapter this same theme is repeated over and over again.

We may now try to examine Jacobi's claim that this chapter of the *Chandogya* anticipated the Sankhya views. The question is: Can the *sat* or Being be looked upon as constituting the rudiments of the concept of the *prakriti* of the Sankhya system? It is difficult to say yes. For though the *prakriti* of the Sankhya philosophers was as subtle and as fundamental as the *sat* of this Upanisadic passage, the *prakriti* was clearly a material principle, whereas the chief aim of the *Upanisad* was to identify this *sat* with the Self or *atman*. And, at least as far as the standard interpretations go, this Self or *atman* was clearly conceived as a spiritual principle. Secondly, though the Upanisadic passage spoke of three principles, viz., (like that of the *prakriti* of the Sankhya, viz., *sattva rajas* and *tamas*) heat, water and food, they were not looked upon as the constituents of the Being but as emanations thereof. Lastly, the Sankhya *prakriti* was not only the principle of primordial matter but also, as we have seen, a female principle. The Being of the *Upanisad* had no such association; it could not have that, because after all, it was a philosophical principle conceived within the framework of male-dominated thinking. This difference is decisive. The *prakriti* of the Sankhya and the *sat* of the *Upanisad* were parts of two distinct world-outlooks. The latter, therefore, could not have anticipated the former.

Yet Jacobi's thesis has special interest for us. By drawing our attention to this particular portion of the *Chandogya*, and by showing, further, that this contained a clear relic of an archaic materialistic outlook, he has inadvertently drawn attention to the problem of the birth of idealism in the Upanisadic literatures. The *Upanisads* are usually looked upon as the repositories of mere spiritual wisdom, as containing an unilineal exposition of the idealistic philosophy. But the actual position is more complex. There is no doubt that an idealistic outlook, later systematised as the Vedanta philosophy, formed the most dominant trend in these texts. What is usually overlooked,

[233] Hume TPU 245-6.

however, is the fact that this idealistic outlook emerged on the ruins of a primitive materialism, traces of which remained scattered over the texts. One of the most typical forms in which this hangover of primitive materialism is to be found in the *Upanisads* is aptly described by Kosambi[234] as 'the food-philosophy.' It is the view that all creatures are produced from food, live by food and pass into food. At the same time, the authors of the *Upanisads* were making conscious efforts to emancipate themselves from the crude and primitive materialistic world-outlook of their forefathers. The story of Bhrigu Varuni of the *Taittiriya Upanisad*[235] is perhaps a suitable example. We shall in Ch. VIII examine how far the fundamental changes in the social life of the Vedic peoples were at the root of this change that took place in their consciousness, i.e., the undermining of primitive materialism and the shift towards a full-fledged idealistic outlook.

What particularly interests us at the moment about the survival of this primitive materialism in the *Upanisads,* is its similarity, *as materialism,* to original Sankhya. For though we may not read in it any real anticipation of the Sankhya view, yet, like the doctrine of the *prakriti,* the doctrine of the three material elements (viz. heat, water and food) of the *Chandogya,* and particularly the view that the mind consists of food and is dependent on food, implied a strange emphasis on materialism. This shows that however bitter might have been the hostility between original Sankhya and the Vedanta, the latter had a history of its own and, in some remote phase of this history, its opposition to the Sankhya *as a materialistic outlook* could not have been very sharp, though the two grew as antagonistic trends in the cultural history of ancient India, rooted as they were in the agricultural-matriarchal and the pastoral-patriarchal conditions respectively. It is true that a full-fledged idealistic outlook emerged in the wake of the latter trend and became the dominant philosophy of the *Upanisads.* Even in the *Upanisads* themselves this idealistic outlook sometimes clearly and directly opposed the fundamentals of the Sankhya. Nevertheless, the survival of a sort of archaic materialism in the *Upanisads* suggests that the ancestors of those who composed the texts were yet to emancipate themselves from the materialistic outlook. We are going to argue in Chapter VIII that the pri-

234 ISIH 123. 235 *Tait. Up.* iii. 1. ff.

mitive materialism of the early Vedic period represented the consciousness of the pastoral-patriarchal people living in a primitive pre-class society. For the present it may be of interest to see how far it is possible to trace the connection of the Sankhya materialism with the pre-class life of the agricultural-matriarchal peoples. For this purpose we have to follow the history of the relation between the Sankhya and the Yoga.

9. Sankhya and Yoga

In the Vedic literatures the word *yoga* originally meant yoking or harnessing.[236] However, this did not remain the only meaning of the word. From a remote antiquity, it also stood for certain practices or exercises supposed to help the attainment of the highest end. This eventually became its primary meaning.

In the philosophical literatures, however, the word came to stand for the name of a particular school of philosophy, systematised in a treatise called the *Yoga Sutra* attributed to a certain Patanjali.[237] What particularly interests us here is the connection of this system with the Sankhya.

This connection was so energetically established in the later times that it has become customary today to speak of Sankhya-Yoga as forming one philosophical complex rather than two. But how old is this connection? Nothing definite can be said about it. But for an arbitrarily introduced concept of God, there is nothing in the philosophical side of the Yoga, not distinctive of the Sankhya. Further, even very early references to the Sankhya theory were also references to the Yoga practices. In view of these, it may reasonably be conjectured that the connection between the Sankhya and the Yoga could not have been the result of later manipulations. And those who were relating the two in later times were but trying to reassert a genuinely ancient tradition. The presumption is that original Sankhya was no more purely theoretical than original Yoga was purely practical; rather, there might have been an original complex of theory and practice out of which emerged the two systems. From

[236] Dasgupta HIP i. 226.

[237] Jacobi (JAOS xxxi. 24 ff.) thought that he could not have been the same person as the ancient grammarian; the *Yoga Sutra* was composed presumably after 540 A.D. Dasgupta (HIP i. 232) said that they were one and the same person and as such the date of the Yoga Sutra was B.C. 147 (HIP i. 212).

this point of view, the history of the Sankhya and the Yoga had three distinct stages. First, the primordial complex of theory and practice. Second, the dissolution of this into a duality of collateral ideologies. Third, the old bond between the two reaffirmed to give us Sankhya-Yoga of the later times.

If there be anything in this presumption, and if further, as we have already seen, the later Sankhya suffered pronounced doctrinal modifications on idealistic lines, then there cannot be any strong ground to believe that the Yoga of the later times—i.e., the Yoga of the *Yoga Sutra*—remained true to its origin, which was the practical aspect of the primordial complex of theory and practice. In short, the Yoga of the *Yoga Sutra* was, in all probability, very much different from the original Yoga practices.

There is nothing new in this view. Competent scholars have argued out this. Some of them have gone so far as to discover the origin of the Yoga in the magical practices of primitive society. What is not argued, however, is that if the relation of the Sankhya and the Yoga were not an innovation of the later thinkers, the origin of the Yoga has some light to throw also on that of the Sankhya.

Said Dasgupta:[238]

> Of the Patanjali school of the Sankhya, which forms the subject of the Yoga,. . . . Patanjali was probably the most notable person for he not only collected the different forms of the Yoga practices, and gleaned the diverse ideas which were or could be associated with the Yoga, but grafted them all on the Sankhya metaphysics, and gave them the form in which they have been handed down to us. Vacaspati and Vijnana Bhiksu, the two great commentators on the *Vyasa Bhasya* (the earliest commentary on Patanjaḷi's *Yoga Sutra*), agree with us in holding that Patanjali was not the founder of the Yoga, but an editor. Analytic study of the *sutras* also brings the conviction that the *sutras* do not show any original attempt, but a masterly and systematic compilation which was also supplemented by fitting contributions.

The possibility of Patanjali grafting his Yoga speculations on the Sankhya metaphysics may not be a necessary hypothesis. If he knew the Yoga practices as prevalent before him, which he certainly did, then he must have known the most important form of it, viz. that which formed the essence of Tantrism. Such practices were current in the country from a hoary past and the doctrines of the *prakriti* and *purusa* formed an intrinsic feature of this Tantrism. This could only mean that Yoga

[238] HIP i. 229.

practices had been already associated with those concepts that later formed the fundamentals of the Sankhya. It would, therefore, be farfetched to imagine that Patanjali arbitrarily grafted the Yoga practices on the Sankhya metaphysics. What he actually did was, in all probability, to reassert the old bond between such practices and the theoretical concepts of the *prakriti* and the *purusa*.

What is important, however, about Dasgupta's observation is that the original Yoga practices must have been immeasurably older than the speculations on these found in the *Yoga Sutra*. If this were so, it would be wrong to look in Patanjali's work for fundamental ideas concerning original Yoga. It is here that the later Yoga resembled the later Sankhya. Later Sankhya was considerably modified on idealistic lines. The Yoga of the *Yoga Sutra,* too, must have been the result of similar modification.

Such idealistic modifications of original Yoga in Patanjali's version were both theoretical and practical. On the theoretical side it was expressed as the arbitrary introduction of the concept of God into the Yoga system. This will be evident from Garbe's[239] comment:

> The object of the Yoga system in inserting the conception of a personal God into the Sankhya is merely to satisfy the theists, and to facilitate the propagation of the theory of the universe expounded in the Sankhya. The idea of God, far from being organically interwoven in the Yoga system, is only loosely inserted. In the *Yoga Sutra* the passages that treat of God stand disconnected, and are, indeed, in direct contradiction to the contents and aim of the system. God neither creates the universe nor does He rule it. He does not reward or punish the actions of men, and the latter do not regard union with Him (at least according to the older doctrine of the Yoga) as the supreme object of their endeavour.... It is evident that this is no God in our sense of the term, and that we have to do with perplexing speculations the aim of which is to conceal the originally atheistic character of the system, and to bring the assumption of God into bare accord with its fundamental teaching. Assuredly these speculations prove, were there any need at all for proof, that in the real Sankhya-Yoga there is no room for a personal God.... The idea of God, however, once having been received into the Yoga system, it became necessary to establish a connection between God and the world of mankind, for God could not continue to exist for his own sake alone. A relation between God and man was found in the fact that, while God does not bestow earthly or heavenly felicity (for this is to be obtained only by individual merit and springs necessarily from it), He in His mercy aids the man who is entirely devoted to Him to remove the hindrances which

[239] ERE xii. 831-2.

stand in the way of the attainment of deliverance. But even this slight relation dependent on human devotion to God and on divine favour is with difficulty intelligible as combined with the doctrine of the Yoga.

If this arbitrary introduction of the concept of God into the system was the result of a deliberate effort to modify it on idealistic or spiritualistic lines, the whole practical process of the Yoga as conceived in the *Yoga Sutra,* was no less so. The Yoga practice, discussed at length in the *Yoga Sutra,* is the formal art of concentration, of effecting a change in the subjective state and a complete withdrawal of the consciousness within itself.

> These texts describe how the senses may be withdrawn from the objects of sense and reduced to inactivity, so that their natural tendency is reversed, and they assume altogether the character of the inner central organ, whose emanations they are; how, in the next place, the activity of the organ of thought, in which all the functions that are dependent upon the influence of the external world are suppressed, is wholly centred upon the *atman* (the self, the soul); and how, finally, in the last stage of absorption, thought and its object completely coincide. By regular observance of the Yoga praxis the hindrances arising from our natural disposition, which make the attainment of saving knowledge so difficult, are most successfully overcome. When absorption has risen to such a height, or rather has penetrated so deep, that no wandering of thought towards other objects is any longer possible, when that disposition of our organ of thought which is prone to go astray can no longer manifest itself, the knowledge of the essential difference of soul and matter is revealed in the form of an intuitive perception, and therewith the final goal of human endeavour is reached.[240]

In short, with the total withdrawal of consciousness from the material world and its concentration on the subject itself, the subject acquires a freedom from being entangled in the objective material world and thus the reality of the material world somehow or other vanishes from his consciousness. The Yoga practices were thus brought to the idealistic level by the *Yoga Sutra.*

However, this version of the Yoga had a long history of development before it became such.

> The conditions of ascetic contemplation practised in the Yoga are the final result of a long development, which takes us back to primitive times, to the ecstatic rites of savage peoples, of which we find traces also in the *Veda.*[241]

The point was first argued by Gough, according to whom the Yoga practices, because their origin is traceable to the prac-

240 *Ib.* xii. 832. 241 *Ib.* xii. 833.

tices of the savages, must have been borrowed by the invading Aryans from the original inhabitants of the country.

It was from the semi-savage races with which they (the Vedic worshippers) were coalescing, and which they were elevating, that they now adopted the practice of fixing the body and the limbs in statue-like repose, and including cataleptic rigidity and insensibility, as a higher state than normal state of human life,—the practice known as the Yoga,—union, ecstasy, the melting away of the consciousness into a state of characterless indetermination. The process seems to be accompanied with intervals of morbid nervous and cerebral exaltation, in which the self-torture loses all distinction between perception and imagination, and appears to himself and others to be invested with superhuman powers.[242]

We shall presently see how far Gough's view of the Yoga practices can at all be tenable. But there is no doubt that his effort to trace the origin of the Yoga to the practices of the primitive peoples is of great interest. To support this view, he selected two quotations from Tylor's *Primitive Culture*.

Among the lower races, and high above their level, morbid ecstasy, brought on by meditation, fasting, narcotics, excitement, or disease, is a state common and held in honour among the very classes specially concerned with mythic idealism.[243]

Throughout the lower civilisation, men believe, with the most vivid and intense belief, in the objective reality of human spectres which they see in sickness or exhaustion, under the influence of mental excitement or of narcotic drugs. One main reason of the practice of fasting, penance, narcotising, and other means of bringing on morbid exaltation, is that the patients may obtain the sight of spectral beings, from whom they look to gain spiritual knowledge, and even worldly power.[244]

Before examining Tylor's hypothesis, let us see how Gough's view of the origin of the Yoga in primitive practices was carried forward by later scholars.

Belvalkar and Ranade have practically accepted Gough's thesis in toto. Referring to the 'wandering swarms of ascetics' described in the Buddhist texts, they said:[245]

It is more natural to suppose that we have here to do with a contact of the Aryans of the Brahmana period with peoples of a different culture whom they encountered in the course of their march into the interior of India. These peoples might have been reduced to homelessness by the conquering Aryans, or—and this is just as likely—they might not have reached a stage beyond that of a nomad, mountaineering life. *Such people are not extinct in India even up to the present day.* And it is surely not too much to credit these people with strange practices and modes of worship which,

242 PU 18.
243 Quot. *Ib.* 19.
244 *Ib.*
245 HIP ii. 81. Italics added.

when taken over into the fold of Aryanism, might have, in the fullness of time, evolved into what came to be known as the Yoga. The Brahmanas show an inordinate thirst for knowledge and had a capacity to assimilate almost everything into their system and to assign to it its own place and period—in due subordination always to the all-important doctrine of sacrifice. And when the bulk of the people became forcibly impressed by the strange and mysterious ways and practices of those wandering ascetics, the Brahmanas could not have long remained unaffected by the Zeit-geist.

The superficial nature of this observation is obvious. Homelessness and nomadism had nothing to do with the essence of the Yoga and the excessive thirst for knowledge of the Brahmanas is a myth exploded long ago.

However, the authors returned later to the same subject and fortunately this time with a clearer conception of the primitive origin of the Yoga practices.

That an acquisition of such 'supernatural' powers is feasible, is the underlying postulate of the Yoga.... Now, we have already seen how a number of practices and prescriptions belonging to the Vedic ritual of the sacrifice could be quite cogently explained by the theory that sacrifice... was an act of sympathetic magic which was aimed primarily at the attainment of control over certain powers and potences conducive to the benefit of the sacrificer and his family. A comparison with similar practices of other primitive races and peoples goes to show that there is an element of sympathetic magic even in ... the form of the *diksa* or initiation which the sacrificer has to undergo and which involves a number of queer dietetic regulations, abnegations and penances. The real origins of the systematised theory of the Yoga are accordingly to be traced to this early Vedic ritual, which, as we saw, was a blend of certain simpler forms of nature-worship with certain animistic or totemistic ideas borrowed from the practices of the neighbouring non-Aryan peoples. That breath-control and other physical exercises possess the power to form and expand the mind, and that contrariwise, concentration and other 'spiritual' exercises powerfully influence the organic functions of the body is, with the followers of the Yoga, almost an unquestioned axiomatic truth. Primitive religious life and practice is largely swayed by this axiom; and no wonder that long before the word 'Yoga' acquired its technical meaning, the fact was familiarly recognised, and it in fact formed the basis for the current ritualistic prescriptions.[246]

What is really important in this observation is not the view of early Vedic ritual as primarily a form of simple nature-worship, nor the assumption of the early Aryans borrowing the primitive elements of their convictions and practices from the neighbouring non-Aryans, but rather the suggestion of the ultimate origin of the Yoga practices in the sympathetic magic of

[246] *Ib.* ii. 405.

the primitive peoples designed to control nature. Before we go into further details of this point concerning the origin of the Yoga in the primitive magical practices, it is necessary for us to be clear about the hypothesis of the advanced Aryans borrowing beliefs and practices of the surrounding backward non-Aryans. We have seen how Gough worked on this hypothesis and how, further, it was uncritically accepted by Belvalkar and Ranade.

The non-Aryans or pre-Aryans, as revealed by the more advanced historical researches, were not necessarily as primitive and backward as the hypothesis implies; nor were the Aryans as advanced and sophisticated as is claimed by the authors of the hypothesis. Besides, it is not clear why these advanced people were so keen to borrow the beliefs and practices of a backward and primitive people. The most serious defect of the hypothesis, however, is that it overlooks the fact that the so-called advanced Aryans, too, had to begin their life at the bottom of the scale and like all other races, had to work gradually upward. In short, they, too, must have had a primitive past. Therefore, whatever was primitive or archaic in their comparatively advanced beliefs and practices need not necessarily have been the result of absorption from an undeveloped people; these were presumably the survivals or relics of their own primitive past.

There is nothing to wonder at the survival of similar beliefs and practices both among the later Aryans and the later non-Aryans, because both emerged from a primitive past, in spite of the fact that this primitive past of the former had the distinctive feature of being based on a pronounced pastoral economy. Therefore, the mere fact that the Yoga was originally rooted in the primitive practices does not necessarily imply that it was borrowed by the Aryans from the non-Aryans, though of course the possibility remains that among the early agriculturists, outside the circle of the Aryans, such practices were developed on a more extensive scale. Garbe, too, argued on the same lines:

> Following the analogy of the primitive peoples of the present day, we may confidently ascribe to that early period the belief that it was possible by ascetic practices to win the power to hold intercourse with the spirit world, and in a marvellous way to change the ordinary course of nature. In ancient India the name for asceticism was *tapas*. This word signified in the first instance 'warmth,' 'heat,' 'fervour,' in the literal sense; then 'the sweat generated by self-mortification,' and 'the condition of internal heat thus caused,' i.e. 'ecstasy.' As at the present day the conjurers among the Indians

of America and among the Negro peoples are wont to proceed in a similar way, so according to the ancient Indian ritual the offerers of the *soma* juice prepared themselves for their task by prolonged fasting, while, clad in the dark skin of wild animals, and 'speaking in a stammering voice,' they tarried by the magic fire. The fact that the word *tapas* in its metaphorical meaning is found first in the later hymns of the *Rig Veda* proves nothing against the extreme antiquity of the above-mentioned ideas or their practical application; for the circle in which the thought of the *Rig Veda* moves has few points of contact with ascetic practices. *Tapas* meets us more frequently in the *Yajur* and the *Atharva Vedas,* and very often in the literatures of the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanisads.* Since *tapas* occupies here the position of a cosmogonic power, by means of which the creator of the universe produces living beings and animate objects, it is evident that already at that period no less influence was ascribed to asceticism than in classical Sanskrit literature, in which the ascetics appear as all-powerful magicians. While, then, originally the ecstatic condition in which man believes himself capable of rising to higher spheres, was sought mainly by fasting and other self-mortification, in India, owing to increasingly introspective character of the spiritual life, stress was laid more and more on meditation and absorption. The conception of the Yoga, therefore, was developed out of that of *tapas.* In this meaning the word *Yoga* is first met with considerably later than *tapas.* But the existence of the peculiar Yoga doctrine is certified already, as stated above, as early as pre-Buddhist times.[247]

According to what has been stated above, there is no need to subject Gough's opinion to a more searching examination; for *what he regards as borrowing in historical times, is, in fact, an inheritance from the most hoary antiquity of the Indo-Germanic race.*[248]

It may be noted here that among the *Upanisads* the Yoga can be traced clearly in the *Svetasvatara, Katha,* and more particularly, in the *Maitri Upanisads;* it is, therefore, not accidental that all these *Upanisads* were appended to the *Krisna Yajur Veda,* one of the earliest collections of the 'magical formulae' of the Vedic people. Thus the Yoga, in the Vedic tradition, had, in all probability its origin in the magical beliefs and practices of the early Vedic peoples themselves. That in these *Upanisads* the Yoga already appeared as cast in the mould of idealistic speculation—i.e., understood as meditation and absorption—is only to be expected; because the idealistic outlook became already dominant in the *Upanisads* and the original Yoga had to be modified to harmonise with it.

It is here that we naturally hesitate to agree with the otherwise significant observations of Garbe. He appears to believe that a certain introspective tendency in the spiritual life characterised the development of Indian thought as such; it was this that ultimately transformed the primitive *tapas* of the early

247 ERE xii. 833.

248 *Ib.* Italics added.

Vedic people into the formal art of meditation and absorption which became the Yoga of later times. Such a generalised picture is evidently due to ignoring the other trend of ancient Indian culture, viz. the non-Vedic. The introspective tendency referred to by Garbe was but an inevitable corollary to the emergence of the idealistic outlook which, in ancient times, became prominent only in one trend of Indian culture–the Vedic trend–which reached its culmination in the *Upanisads*. With its moorings in the patriarchal society of a pastoral people, this trend never ceased to look at the *purusa* as the highest reality, and, as we have seen, when in the *Upanisads* the idealistic outlook fully emerged, the *purusa* was interpreted as the detached witness or pure consciousness. This explains why the Yoga of the *Upanisads* never lost its associations with the concept of the *purusa* idealistically understood.

Now the other trend in our cultural history which had its moorings in the matriarchal society of the early agriculturists accepted *prakriti* or the female principle as the ultimate reality which was understood as a purely material first cause. This trend was represented chiefly by the Tantra and the Sankhya. The practices characteristic of the primitive agricultural magic formed the essence of the Tantrika rituals; it is here, rather than in the idealistic version of the Yoga in the *Upanisads* and the *Yoga Sutra,* that we are to seek the origin of the Yoga, simply because of the fact that the yoga practices in this non-Vedic trend did not suffer the same kind of doctrinal modification as it did in the Vedic.

What could have been the primitive or original significance of the Yoga practices? At the present stage of our knowledge of the primitive peoples, we need no longer view their beliefs and practices as mysterious and meaningless. We have already discussed the role of magic in primitive life. It was an illusory technique to aid the real one. In a sense, the very survival of the primitive community depended on the success of this magical performance. The magician had accordingly, to work himself up to a point of delirious frenzy and ecstasy. He had to feel a super-normal power within himself, with the aid of which alone he could hope to bring the forces of nature under his control. Such a super-normal power could not be a material reality; it had to be a psychological one. The primitive magician had to feel that he possessed it. He tried various techniques to acquire a sense of the most stupendous power. Such techniques includ-

ed various physical exercises, the control of breath, abstinence, withdrawal, self-torture, narcotics. These did induce 'morbid nervous and cerebral exaltation' and sometimes even a 'cataleptic rigidity and insensibility.' It is to all these, rather than to any inherent tendency of the savage mind to 'mythical idealism,' that we are to trace the origin of the Yoga practices; and the original purpose behind these was to bring nature under control and not to effect any hypothetical 'communion with the spirit world.'

It may be possible to find in some rare passages of the earlier portions of the Vedic literatures, the traces of such primitive practices in their original form. Nevertheless, it would be more fruitful to look for it outside the Vedic trend, viz. in the trend represented by the early agriculturists. There are two reasons for this. First, the pastoral economy of the early Vedic peoples, compared to the early agricultural economy, was not so vitally dependent upon magical beliefs and practices. Secondly, with the transformation of the Vedic ideology into the ideology of the ruling class, the elements inherited by it from the tribal past gradually passed into their opposite and were interpreted as the formal art of meditation upon the Self and on God. However, the non-Vedic ideology did not become the ideology of the parasitical class and remained prevalent (*ayata*) among the masses (*loka*). The beliefs and practices underlying these remained 'closely associated with the most ancient folk-practices of the people.'[249] The most dominant form of this non-Vedic ideology being Tantrism, it is here that we should look for the genuine form of original Yoga.

Tantrism, besides being characterised by primitive magical practices, was also based upon principles of the *prakriti* and the *purusa*. This cannot but remind us of the Sankhya. We are thus led back to the presumption we started from. The connection between the Sankhya and the Yoga was not an innovation of later thinkers; original Sankhya was indeed no more purely theoretical than original Yoga was purely practical. There was originally a primordial complex of theory and practice, the agricultural ritual of the primitive peoples.

10. New Form and Content

Nevertheless, original Sankhya, whatever its ultimate source might have been, was not primitive agricultural magic. It was

[249] Cf. Needham on the representatives of primitive Shamanism in ancient China (SCC ii. 35).

not even the same as Tantrism, the theoretical basis of which —viz. the doctrine of the *prakriti*—was enmeshed in the most extensive forms of rituals and myths. The Sankhya had been a form of conscious philosophy opposed to, and in turn being opposed by, the earliest representatives of the idealistic outlook. How the archaic proto-materialistic ideas underlying Tantrism ultimately acquired such a form of conscious philosophical system needs to be revealed by further historical researches. Garbe suggested that a conscious opposition to the idealistic philosophy of the *Upanisads* might have resulted in the birth of the Sankhya:

> ...there can be no doubt in my opinion that the idealistic doctrine of the *Upanisads* regarding the *Brahman-Atman*—a doctrine which has grown from the *Veda* and which is the nucleus and centre of the later Vedanta system—is an older product of philosophical thinking than the leading ideas of the other systems. Apparently, *the foundation of the Sankhya philosophy is to be sought in a reaction against the propagation of the consistent idealism which began to be proclaimed with enthusiasm.*[250]

In view of the extreme antiquity of the Sankhya attested to by Garbe himself, we may not accept the first part of this statement. Nevertheless, it might have been quite possible that the development of the original Sankhya from Tantrism was the result of a conscious resistance to the Upanisadic idealism.

What is more important for us is to remember that this was not simply a matter of a change in *form*. For this revolution of the primitive proto-materialism was inevitably accompanied by a revolution in its *contents*. While re-stating the fundamentals of primitive beliefs in the form of a materialistic philosophy, consciously opposed to idealism, the early Sankhya philosophers had to introduce new and significant changes in content also.

A brief account of this new form and content acquired by original Sankhya is necessary for our enquiry. But we face here the old problem over again: since 'much of the Sankhya literatures is lost' to us and since, further, 'there is no continuity of tradition from ancient times up to the age of the commentators,' how are we to determine a certain attitude or a certain theory as indicative of the form or content of original Sankhya? Fortunately, at this stage of our discussion, we may depend upon a comparatively simpler procedure. We have already seen that originally the Sankhya must have been the doctrine of the *pra-*

[250] ACPVMCSS intro. xix. Italics added.

dhana and that the idealistic understanding of the *purusa*, though occurring in the *Karika*, was borrowed from the Vedantists by those later representatives of the system who were in reality trying to convert the Sankhya into a form of disguised Vedanta. Therefore whatever is found in the later texts to be consistent with the doctrine of the *pradhana* or to follow from it, must be viewed as belonging to original Sankhya, while, whatever is found to follow from the idealistic understanding of the *purusa* must be looked upon as being extrinsic to original Sankhya. It may be true that the corollaries drawn by the later commentators from the principle of the *pradhana* might not have *historically* belonged to the system in its early form; but the very fact that it was possible for them to draw such corollaries goes to show that these must have *potentially* belonged to the fundamental tenet of the system.

'The Sankhya system,' said Garbe,[251] 'is throughout rationalistic.' Evidently, it was because of this that Samkara referred to the doctrine of the *pradhana* as based on very serious reasoning (*gurutara tarkavala*).[252] For an understanding of original Sankhya it is important to remember further that this thoroughly rationalistic attitude of the early Sankhya philosophers was, in all probability, the result of their conscious opposition to the mystic idealism of the *Upanisads*. From the standpoint of the *Upanisads*—or more specifically, of the philosophers who tried later to systematise these—reasoning by itself had no validity. *Sruti* or direct scriptural revelation alone had any intrinsic claim to truth; reasoning had merit only as subservient to *sruti*. It was because of such a clash between the fundamental attitudes of the Sankhya and the Vedanta, that the author of the *Brahma Sutra*, in connection with his refutation of the Sankhya, found it necessary to formulate a special aphorism designed to dismiss the authenticity of independent reasoning. Samkara[253] commented on it:

> In matters to be known from Scripture mere reasoning is not to be relied on for the following reason also. As the thoughts of man are altogether unfettered, reasoning which disregards the holy texts and rests on individual opinion only has no proper foundation. We see how arguments, which some clever men had excogitated with great pains, are shown, by people still more ingenious, to be fallacious, and how the arguments of the latter again are refuted in their turn by other men; so that, on account of the diversity of men's opinions, it is impossible to accept mere reasoning as having a sure

[251] ERE xi. 190.
[252] on *Br. Su.* ii. 1.12.
[253] SBE xxxiv. 314-5.

foundation. Nor can we get over this difficulty by accepting as well-founded the reasoning of some person of recognised mental eminence, may he now be Kapila or anybody else; since we observe that even men of the most undoubted mental eminence, such as Kapila, Kanada, and other founders of philosophical schools, have contradicted one another.

Again:

How therefore can knowledge which is founded on reasoning, and whose object is not something permanently uniform, be perfect knowledge? Nor can it be said that he who maintains the *pradhana* to be the cause of the world is the best of all reasoners, and accepted as such by all philosophers; which would enable us to accept his opinion as perfect knowledge. Nor can we collect at a given moment and on a given spot all the logicians of the past, present, and future time, so as to settle (by their agreement) that their opinion regarding some uniform object is to be considered perfect knowledge. The *Veda*, on the other hand, which is eternal and the source of all knowledge, may be allowed to have for its object firmly established things, and hence the perfection of that knowledge which is founded on the *Veda* cannot be denied by any of the logicians of the past, present, or future.[254]

Whether such an argument conclusively demolishes the claim of rational thinking in favour of scriptural revelation, is a different question. What particularly concerns us here is another point: If the representatives of extreme idealism like Samkara found it necessary to argue like this against the upholders of the doctrine of the *pradhana*, the obvious implication is that the latter were trying to establish their views on the basis of thorough rationalism. Therefore, those later exponents of the Sankhya, trying to justify their position also by appealing to the authority of the Scriptures, deviated from original Sankhya and made surreptitious compromises with the Vedanta. The writings of Samkara, however, show that without a surrender of the fundamentals of original Sankhya, such a compromise created gross inconsistencies within the Sankhya system. To a highly conscious idealist like him, mystical idealism could not be reconciled to rational materialism. Referring to the Vedanta and the Sankhya he said,

the alternatives suggested by the two being exhaustive, either of the two doctrines must necessarily be accepted (*sadharanatvat na anyatarasmin pakse codaitavya bhavanti iti*).[255]

Bearing in mind this uncompromising rationalism of original Sankhya, we may now pass on to consider how the early representatives of the system tried to argue that primitive matter

[254] *Ib*. xxxiv. 316-7. [255] on *Br. Su*. ii. 1.10.

called the *pradhana* could alone be the ultimate reailty. To the early philosophers of both the idealistic and materialistic schools, the problem of the ultimate reality appeared as the problem of the first cause of the world. Consistent with their rational attitude, the early Sankhya philosophers thought that a view of the ultimate cause of the world could be arrived at only on the basis of a satisfactory theory of causation. Hence their starting point was an enquiry into the general principle of causality.

This is how Samkara[256] summed up the Sankhya view of causality:

> ... Things of an altogether different character cannot stand to each other in the relation of material cause and effect. Such effects, for instance, as golden ornaments do not have earth for their material cause, nor is gold the material cause of earthen vessels; but effects of an earthy nature originate from earth and effects of the nature of gold from gold.

In the *Sankhya Karika*[257] a number of proofs were offered in support of this view:

> Effect subsists (antecedently to the operation of cause); for what exists not, can by no operation of cause be brought into existence. Materials, too, are selected which are fit for the purpose: everything is not by every means possible: the capable alone is competent to act; and like is produced from like.

Gaudapada[258] analysed this into five distinct arguments. First, if the nature of the effect was altogether different in character from that of the cause, the non-existent could produce the existent. But that is impossible. 'In this world there is no making of what is not; as, the production of oil from sand; therefore the instrumental cause produces what is, from its having been formerly implanted.' Secondly, specific material cause is necessary for the production of the specific effect: 'thus, in life, a man who desires a thing, selects that by which it may be produced; as he who wishes for curds, takes milk, not water.' Thirdly, 'everything is not by every means possible. The universal possibility of everything is not; as gold in silver, etc. or in grass, dust or sand.' Fourthly, 'what is capable does that to which it is competent; as, a potter is the capable agent; the implements, the lump of clay, the wheel, rag, rope, water, etc. (are capable) by which he makes the jar, which is capable of being so made from earth.' Lastly, like is produced from like: 'as barley is produced from barley, rice from rice.'

256 SBE xxxiv. 300-1. 257 9.
258 Translations used in the following quotations are from Colebrooke SK 28.

From the repeated references in these arguments to the instances of everyday life, it is not difficult to see on what basis the Sankhya philosophers arrived at this view of causality. As Samkara said, the real strength behind it was that of the observation of nature, *dristanta vala*. And the fact that Samkara tried his very best to refute this view of causality indicates the danger he saw in it to his idealistic principle of a spiritual first cause. As he himself represented the argument of the Sankhya:

The Vedantic opinion that the intelligent Brahman is the material cause of this world is untenable because the effect would in that case be of an altogether different character from the cause. For this world, which the Vedantin considers as the effect of the *brahman*, is perceived to be non-intelligent and impure, consequently different in character from the *brahman;* the *brahman* again is declared by the sacred texts to be of a character different from the world, namely intelligent and pure.[259]

On the other hand, the Sankhya inference from this view of causality to the doctrine of a material first cause was simple enough: if the nature of the effect was indicative of the nature of the cause, the cause of the world must be essentially material because the world itself is such. As Samkara summed up the point:

... this world which is non-intelligent and comprises *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*, can only be the effect of a cause itself non-intelligent and made up of *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*.[260]

We may quote Garbe, who summed up the Sankhya view of causality and the inference therefrom of a material first cause:

The material universe is traced back by a correct philosophical method to a first cause. The Sankhya doctrine proceeds on the principle that the product is none other than the 'material cause' in a definite stage of evolution, and that the preceding stages are to be inferred from that which lies open before us. By this means a first principle was finally reached, which is of the nature of cause only, and not also of product. This is the *prakriti,* primitive matter, from which the universe is evolved in regular course. It further teaches the existence in the entire material universe of three substances (*gunas*), united in dissimilar and unstable proportions, of which the first (*sattva*) exhibits the qualities of lightness, illumination and joy; the second (*rajas*), of movement, excitation and pain; the third (*tamas*), of heaviness, obstruction, and sloth. Hence the conclusion necessarily follows that primitive matter also was composed of these three constituents. Undeveloped primitive matter is the 'state of equilibrium of the three *gunas*.' As a result of a disturbance, which is not more definitely described, of this condition of equilibrium, the material universe is evolved....[261]

259 SBE xxxiv. 300.
260 *Ib.* xxxiv. 301.
261 ERE xi. 190.

At the same time it is necessary to remember that in spite of this brilliant summing up of the Sankhya theory of the *prakriti* or 'primitive matter,' Garbe did not agree to accept original Sankhya as a form of materialism.

> It recognises two uncreated substances, existing from all eternity, but differing essentially from one another. These are (1) matter, which Kapila, in opposition to the doctrine of the *Upanisads*, regarded not as an illusory appearance, but as something real; and (2) souls, which are conceived not as emanations from the world-soul, but as an *infinite multitude of individual souls*.[262]

It was, thus, the principle of the *purusas* in the Sankhya system (and certain corollaries like the doctrine of liberation that followed from it) which prevented Garbe from accepting the system as materialistic. For him the principle of the *purusas* or souls was indispensable for the Sankhya, for the *purusas* played at least two decisive roles in the system. First, without these the starting point of the evolutionary process could not be explained. Secondly, the Sankhya theory of knowledge was vitally dependent upon the principle of the *purusas*.

The question of the beginnings of the evolution first. Said Garbe:

> Unconscious primitive matter then issues from its stable equilibrium and becomes the subject of evolution; and matter during the period of the existence of the universe continually brings forth new products. For this process it becomes necessary to assign some cause. The developments and combinations of inert matter which take place unceasingly *would be inexplicable if they were not effected by a spiritual principle*. This principle is the collective influence of the innumerable individual souls which—themselves incapable of any activity—contemplate, as spectators from all eternity, the movement of matter. It is not by conscious will that the souls exert an influence on matter but by their mere presence, which in a purely mechanical way excites matter to activity and development, just as the magnet acts on the iron.[263]

It is not clear wherefrom Garbe got this idea of the *collective influence of the innumerable individual souls*. The theory of the passive influence and the analogy of iron and magnet are of course familiar; however, when the author of the *Karika* spoke of these, he, conveniently enough, no longer referred to the plurality of the *purusas* at all. Evidently, Garbe was trying to make the position of Isvarakrisna more consistent by inventing the theory of the collective influence of the *purusas*. Nevertheless, even this invention did not establish the vital importance of the *purusas* for the Sankhya theory of evolution. It was only

[262] *Ib*. [263] *Ib*. Italics Added.

because Garbe himself was uncritically relying upon the idealistic outlook that he argued that the development and combination of inert matter would be inexplicable if not effected by a spiritual principle. There is nothing intrinsically impossible in the theory of such developments and combinations taking place according to the laws of nature; these laws are all that is necessary to move inert matter. Original Sankhya might have been the theory of matter in motion. At least, there was nothing to prevent the early Sankhya philosophers from arguing on this line because, as we have already seen, they also subscribed to the doctrine of *svabhava* or natural laws. On the other hand, some of the later Sankhya philosophers, surrendering this doctrine of *svabhava* and trying to make the *purusas* somehow or other responsible for initiating the changes in the *prakriti*, converted the Sankhya into a bundle of contradictions. Isvarakrisna actually followed this procedure and it remained for Samkara to expose the contradictions resulting therefrom.

The other ground on which Garbe thought that the principle of the *purusas* was vitally important for the Sankhya, was connected with its theory of knowledge.

> Here, however, we are concerned with a much more important office which the soul has to fulfil in the life of the individual. It is true that only figurative expressions are here employed by the original texts; but there is no possibility of mistaking their meaning when they ascribe to the soul the *illumination* of the process going on in the inner organ. All these processes must indeed remain purely mechanical and unconscious, unless the soul, 'by virtue of its nearness,' illuminates them, i.e., brings them to consciousness.[264]

It is not clear, however, why it should be indispensable for the Sankhya to speak of a special principle of consciousness, over and above the primeval *prakriti* or the *pradhana*, to explain the *illumination* taking place in the knowledge-process. For, all the potentialities of this *illumination* were already there in the *pradhana*, one of the constituents of which being *sattva*—lightness, illumination and joy.

We thus find that both the grounds on which Garbe argued the vital importance and indispensable necessity of the *purusas* in the Sankhya are untenable. Therefore, we must agree with the older scholars who regarded 'the soul in this system as entirely superfluous.' And if the soul was really superfluous, the Sankhya as a whole was a thoroughly materialistic philoso-

[264] *Ib.* xi. 191.

phy—the doctrine of the *pradhana* or the *prakriti*, as the early Vedantists in fact understood it.

We may now pass on to consider the Sankhya theory of evolution which gave this system a unique status in the history of Indian philosophy. The starting point, again, is the concept of causality.

The Sankhya view of causality is often represented as the doctrine of the pre-existence of the effect in the cause. Such a representation will be misleading if the distinction involved in it between the potential and the actual is not clearly remembered. The tree is contained within the seed; nevertheless, the tree is not the seed nor is the seed the tree. In other words, the tree is contained only potentially within the seed. It is only in this sense that the nature of the tree is determined by the nature of the seed or, conversely, the nature of the seed can be inferred from the nature of the tree. As Gaudapada[265] explained: from the nature of the *vrihi*-plant we may infer that it must have been produced by the *vrihi*-seeds, or, from the nature of the *sali*-plant we may infer that it must have been produced from the *sali*-seed. Similar is the relation between the visible world and the *prakriti*. The visible world is the product or effect of the *prakriti* and as such, from the essential materiality of the visible world we may infer the essential materiality of the *prakriti* itself. But that does not mean that the *prakriti* is to be equated to the visible world and as such the rendering of the term as 'nature,' done by some scholars,[266] is somewhat misleading. Nature, in the sense of the totality of the phenomena of the visible world, is potentially contained in the *prakriti* but the *prakriti* and nature are not the same.

The actual terminology employed by the Sankhya philosophers to distinguish between 'nature as the product of the *prakriti*' and 'the *prakriti* as the cause of nature' were *vyakta* and *avyakta*, the expressed and the pre-expressed or, as these are commonly rendered, the manifest and the unmanifest. The differences between the two, as summed up by the *Karika*,[267] are as follows. The *vyakta* is caused, non-eternal or inconstant, non-pervading, active, multitudinous, dependent, liable to extinction, made of parts and serving (something else); the *avyakta* is the reverse of all these. Again, according to the *Karika*,[268]

[265] On *SK* 9.
[266] E.g. Colebrooke repeatedly did it.
[267] 10. [268] 11.

the *avyakta* on the other hand, resembles the *vyakta* in being composed of the three *gunas* (*trigunam*), without the faculty of discrimination (*aviveki*), objective (*visayah*), universal (*samanyam*), unconscious (*acetanam*) and prolific (*prasava dharmi*).

At least one point is clear. The *pradhana* or primeval matter in its essential materiality is different from the visible world in its sensuous concretion. The Sankhya philosophers were evidently trying to arrive at the notion of a material first cause which was infinitely more subtle and nebulous than the world of sense with its gross and concrete objects. It is here that the early Sankhya philosophers instinctively touched upon the fundamental ideas of positive science. Said Seal:[269]

> The manifested world is traced in the Sankhya to an unmanifested ground, the *prakriti*, which is conceived as formless and undifferentiated, limitless and ubiquitous, indestructible and undecaying, ungrounded and uncontrolled, without beginning and without end.

In its primitive pre-evolved state, this *prakriti* formed a perfect equilibrium (*samya avastha*) of its three constituents or *gunas*, called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. We cannot be sure what these qualities originally stood for; 'no definite explanation of the *gunas* is found in any other work before Vijnana Bhiksu.'[270] Nevertheless, we shall not go very much against the spirit of the older as well as of the later texts if we interpret these as the potentials of manifested intelligence (*sattva*), of manifested energy (*rajas*) and of manifested mass or inertia (*tamas*). According to the *Karika*,[271] these *gunas* are always uniting, separating and uniting again. A disturbance in the primeval equilibrium of the three *gunas* in the *prakriti* marked the starting point of the evolution of the world. We do not know how exactly original Sankhya conceived the cause of this initial disturbance. Later Sankhya philosophers wanted to explain it as due to the passive influence of the *purusa* on the *prakriti*, an interpretation that makes the Sankhya somewhat similar to the philosophy of Anaxagoras. But such an interpretation makes the Sankhya internally inconsistent. The *purusa*, like the *prakriti*, is eternal and, therefore, its passive influence, too, must have been eternal; so, if this passive influence of the *purusa* upon the *prakriti* be the real cause for the disturbance of the primeval equilibrium

[269] PSAH 2-3.
[270] Dasgupta HIP i. 224.
[271] 12.

in the *prakriti*, it will be impossible to conceive of any beginning of this process of the disturbance of the equilibrium itself. Yet the fact is that in the Sankhya a beginning of this process was definitely conceived. Perhaps, we may get a more consistent picture of the Sankhya standpoint if we agree to conceive that the love and strife among the three *gunas*, the uniting and separating of them going on within the bosom of the *prakriti*, somehow or other destroy their original equilibrium and initiate the process of evolution. But whatever might have been the cause conceived by original Sankhya for this initial disturbance of the equilibrium of the three *gunas* within the *prakriti*, there is no doubt that the Sankhya philosophers conceived that the three *gunas*, obviously no longer as potentialities of intelligence, energy and inertia, characterised all the later evolutes of the *prakriti*. That is, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* constituted the essence of all the things of the concrete visible world. But there is in these evolutes no more any equilibrium of the *gunas*, some preponderant over the others.

> For example in any material system at rest the mass is patent, the energy latent, and the conscious manifestation sub-latent. In a moving body, the *rajas*, enery, is predominant (kinetic), while the mass, or rather the resistance it offers, is overcome. In the volitional consciousness accompanied with movement, the transformation of energy (or work done by *rajas*) goes hand in hand with the predominance of the conscious manifestation, while the matter-stuff or mass, though latent, is to be inferred from the resistance overcome.[272]

But what happens in the case of those phenomena of the world that we are accustomed to characterise as states of consciousness? Seal did not raise the question, perhaps because the answer to it, according to the same line of interpretation, would have made the Sankhya much too overtly materialistic. For the states of consciousness are to be viewed, from this standpoint, as those in which though the *sattva* is predominant there must also be energy and mass—*rajas* and *tamas*—as latent and sub-latent. That is, even the states of consciousness are not strictly so; the characteristics of crude matter must be latently present in these too. It is tempting to comment here that if we agree to integrate later scientific knowledge with this standpoint, we have to re-state it as the view that thought or consciousness is not without a latent cerebral process. It will be the fundamental premise of a materialistic theory of knowledge,

[272] Seal PSAH 5.

though certain modern philosophers 'have piled tome upon tome in order to deny, destroy, or obscure it.'[273] In any case, though the early Sankhya philosophers were yet to be acquainted with the connection of consciousness with the cerebral process, there is no doubt that they were trying to understand intelligence, ego-consciousness, mind and the sense organs as essentially the products of matter. This is clear from their theory of evolution.

It is necessary to discuss two other points before taking up the Sankhya view of evolution. First, though Isvarakrisna tried to connect this process with the principle of the *purusa* in a two-fold way,—viz., on the one hand the passive influence of the *purusa* as initiating the process of evolution, while on the other the entire process of evolution as moving towards the fulfilment of the purpose of enjoyment and liberation of the *purusa*—we have already seen that such connections were arbitrarily conceived by him and made the Sankhya philosophy internally inconsistent. It is therefore logical to reject such ideas while discussing the Sankhya view of evolution. Secondly, if original Sankhya really represented a development of the beliefs underlying Tantrism, which it presumably did, it was natural for the early Sankhya philosophers to have conceived the birth of the universe, i.e., the evolution of the visible world from the *prakriti,* on the model of human birth. In other words, ideas of fetal development were inextricably mixed up with the ideas of cosmic evolution in original Sankhya. This explains why the ideas of human body getting a definite shape were so much a part of the Sankhya view of evolution, a circumstance that created considerable confusion in the later understanding of the view. We do not expect modern materialism from the early Sankhya philosophers nor do we expect any full-fledged modern theory of evolution from them. What is really important is that they conceived the ultimate cause of the universe as essentially material and, further, they did conceive everything existing in nature as evolving from this material first cause, and consequently, all the psychical elements in nature were looked upon as having an ultimately material character. With these considerations, we may now proceed to understand the theory of evolution of early Sankhya.

'Evolution begins with the disturbance of the original equilibrium. How this is mechanically brought about is not very

[273] Thomson SAGS ii. 21.

clear.[274] We have tried to understand it in terms of the three *gunas* alone: the processes of uniting and separating perpetually going on among the *gunas* break up at a certain stage, the uniform diffusion of intelligence, energy and inertia lead to unequal aggregation, and therefore to the relative preponderance of one over the others. Thus commences formative combination among the *gunas* and the consequent productive activity. Seal, too, tried to sum up the Sankhya formula of evolution in terms of *differentiation in integration*:

Evolution in its formal aspect is defined as differentiation in the integrated. In other words, the process of evolution consists in the development of the differentiated within the undifferentiated, of the determinate within the indeterminate, of the coherent within the incoherent. The evolutionary series is subject to a definite law which it cannot overstep. The order of succession is not from the whole to parts, nor from parts to whole, but ever from a relatively less differentiated, less determinate, less coherent whole to a relatively more differentiated, more determinate, more coherent whole.[275]

What particularly interests us is the order of succession in this evolutionary series and we cannot do any better than quote Seal's remarkable summary of it. Here is how he represented the different stadia in the order of cosmic evolution as understood by the Sankhya philosophers:

(1) The inconceivable, the unknowable, the formless, of which no character can be predicated (*alinga*), including the *prakriti*, or the Reals (*gunas*) in a state of equilibrium.

(2) The knowable, the empirical universe, cosmic matter of experience, things as matter or stuff of consciousness (*linga*), comprising *mahat*, the intelligible essence of the cosmos, evolved by differentiation and integration within the formless, characterless, inconceivable *prakriti*.

(3) Individual but still indeterminate stuff bifurcating into two series—subject-experience and object-experience, comprising on the one hand the indeterminate unity of appreciation, or the empirical ego, as the coordinating principle of the subject-series, (*asmita*), and on the other hand (though through the mediation of this subjective modification, *asmita* or *ahamkara*) the indeterminate material potencies, the subtle vehicles of potential energy (*tanmatra, suksma bhuta*) the ultimate subtle constituents of the object-series (the material world). The previous stadium, the cosmic matter of experience (*linga, mahat*), evolves within itself, by differentiation and integration, an individuated but still indeterminate stuff in two coordinated series, subject and object, though the latter is mediated through the former.

(4) Determinate stuff (*visesa*) evolved within the indeterminate by further differentiation and integration, viz. in the series of subject-experience, sensory and motor stuff; and in the object-series, a corresponding atomic mater-stuff actualising the material poten-

[274] Seal PSAH 6. [275] *Ib.* 7.

cies in the form of specific sensible energies. The latter includes the different classes of *paramanus,* the different kinds of atomic constituents of different kinds of gross matter (*sthula bhuta*).

(5) Coherent and integrated matter-stuff, individual substances, characterised by generic and specific properties, which however are not rigidly fixed, but fluent, being subject to a three-fold change and constantly evolving.

(6) And so the cosmic series moves on in ascending stages of unstable equilibrium (*visadrisa parinama*) until the reverse course of equilibriation and dissipation of energy (*sadrisa parinama* and *samya avastha*), which even now constantly accompanies the evolution and transformation of energy, completes the disintegration of the universe into its original unmanifested ground, the unknowable *prakriti*.[276]

What it was that suggested to the Sankhya philosophers such a theory of cosmic evolution cannot possibly be determined at the present stage of the researches into its early history. Nor can it be claimed with certainty that all the ideas contained in the above account of evolution was consciously formulated in original Sankhya. (Seal has drawn mainly on Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutra,* a much later text). Nevertheless the fact remains that original Sankhya did formulate a theory of evolution and the original view of the Sankhya philosophers carried the rudiments of such idea because these came as logical consequences of their doctrine of the *prakriti* or the *pradhana*. It was thus the doctrine of the *pradhana*, i,e., the doctrine of a material first cause, that gave original Sankhya a unique position in the history of Indian philosophy and let early Sankhya to provide our philosophical tradition with the fundamental ideas of the positive sciences.

[276] Ib. 8-10.

Chapter Seven

SAMGHA AND NIYATI

STUDIES IN ILLUSION AND REALITY

Since modern writers[1] on ancient Indian philosophy usually discuss certain philosophers like Ajita Kesakambali and Makkhali Gosala as followers of the Lokayyata, our study of the Lokayata demands a review of their philosophies. We cannot do this, however, without a discussion of the origin of Buddhism and its early role. There are two reasons for this. First, these philosophers, mentioned in the Buddhist and the Jaina texts, were, in all probability, contemporaries of the Buddha. Thus the age of the Buddha forms the natural background in which alone we can understand them. Secondly, historically speaking, they were but failures and even their philosophies were essentially the philosophies of frustration and futility. This failure of theirs, again, can be understood only in contrast with the success of the Buddha. However, the success of the Buddha and the significance of his historical role is itself a matter of controversy and we begin with a brief account of these.

1. Two Views on Early Buddhism

Rhys Davids[2] summed up the controversy thus:

> Some writers on Buddhism do not hesitate to ascribe to Gotama[3] the role of a successful political reformer, by representing him as having fought for the poor and despised against the rich and privileged classes, and as having gone far to abolish caste. Other writers

[1] Dasgupta HIP iii. 520 ff.; Sastri L 1-2. [2] BD i.96.

[3] Buddha, the Enlightened, is properly the title only after his enlightenment. Gotama was his clan-name. Sakyamuni, the sage of the Sakyas, was a reference to him by his tribal name. The commonest epithet for him in the sacred texts is Bhagava (Bhagavat), usually rendered as the Blessed One.

gird at the Buddha because most of the leaders of his Order were drawn from the ranks of the respectable and the well-to-do, with an education in keeping with their social position; and disparage him for neglecting the humble and the wretched, for not using his influence to abolish, or to mitigate, the harshness of caste rules.

We are going to argue, like Rhys Davids,[4] that 'both views are equally unhistorical,' though the grounds of our argument would be different from those of the eminent scholar. But the two views first.

It seems that Rhys Davids was himself inclined to view the Buddha as greatly sympathetic towards the oppressed people:

> In the first place, as regards his own Order, over which alone he had complete control, he ignores completely and absolutely all advantages or disadvantages arising from birth, occupation, and social status, and sweeps away all barriers and disabilities arising from the arbitrary rules of ceremonial or social impurity.[5]

Here are certain evidences to justify such a view. The Buddha himself is recorded to have said:

> As the great streams, O disciples, however many they be, the Ganga, Yamuna, Aciravati, Sarabhu, Mahi when they reach the great ocean, lose their old name and their old descent, and bear only one name, 'the great ocean,' so also, my disciples, these four castes, Noble, Brahman, Vaisya and Sudra, when they, in accordance with the law and doctrine which the Perfect One has preached forsake their home and go into homelessness, lose their old name and old paternity, and bear only the one designation, 'ascetics, who follow the son of the Sakya house.'[6]

In fact, the pride of birth and lineage was the very opposite of what the Buddha was preaching:

> In the supreme perfection in wisdom and righteousness. . . . there is no reference to the question either of birth, or of lineage or of the pride which says: 'You are held as worthy as I,' or 'You are not held as worthy as I.' It is where the talk is of marrying, or of giving in marriage, that reference is made to such things as that. For whosoever, Ambatha, are in bondage to the notions of birth or of lineage, or to the pride of social position, or of connection by marriage, they are far from the best wisdom and righteousness. It is only by having got rid of all such bondage that one can realise for himself that supreme perfection in wisdom and in conduct.[7]

It followed, therefore, that within the Buddhist Order there could have been no distinction between the higher and the lower castes, or even between the king and the slave. The Buddha once asked king Ajatasattu that if a slave of the royal household

[4] DB i.96.
[5] *Ib.* i.102.
[6] Oldenberg B 152.
[7] Rhys Davids DB i.123.

left the palace, took to the yellow robe of the Order and lived the life of a monk without reproach in thought, word or deed, 'Would you then say, let the man come back and be a slave again?' And the king answered:

Nay, Lord, rather should we greet him with reverence, and rise up from our seat out of deference towards him, and press him to be seated. And we should have robes and a bowl, and a lodging place, and medicine for the sick—all the requisites of a recluse—made ready, and beg him to accept of them. And we should order watch and ward and guard to be kept for him according to the law.[8]

The Buddha, it is said, addressed himself 'to the welfare of many people, to the joy of many people, to the blessing, welfare and joy of gods and men.'[9] It is no wonder then that many people of 'mean origin' should have found very important status within the Order. Rhys Davids[10] prepared an interesting list:

One of the most distinguished members of his Order, the very one of them who was referred to as the chief authority, after Gotama himself, on the rules of the Order, was Upali, who had formerly been a barber, one of the despised occupations. So also Sunita, one of the brethren whose verses are chosen for insertion in the *Thera Gatha,* was a *pukkusa,* one of the low tribes. Sati, the propounder of a deadly heresy, was of the sons of the fisherfolk, afterwards a low caste, and even then an occupation, on account of its cruelty, particularly abhorred. Nanda was a cowherd. The two Panthakas were born out of wedlock, to a girl of good family through intercourse with a slave... Capa was the daughter of a deer-stalker, Punna and Punnika had been slave girls. Sumangalamata was daughter and wife to workers in rushes, and Subha was the daughter of a smith. More instances could doubtless be quoted already, and others will become known when more texts are published.

This way of looking at Buddhism have been emphatically questioned by other scholars. Said Oldenberg:[11]

We can quite understand how historical treatment in our times, which takes a delight in deepening its knowledge of religious movements by bringing into prominence or discovering their social bearings, has attributed to the Buddha the role of a social reformer, who is conceived to have broken the chains of caste and won for the poor and humble their place in the spiritual kingdom which he founded. But any one who attempts to describe the Buddha's labours must, out of love for truth, resolutely combat the notion that the fame of such an exploit, in whatever way he may depict it to himself, belongs to the Buddha. If any one speaks of a democratic element in Buddhism, he must bear in mind that the conception of any reformation of national life, every notion in any way based on the foundation of an ideal earthly kingdom, of a religious Utopia, was quite foreign to this fraternity. There was nothing resembling a

[8] *Ib.* i.77.
[9] Oldenberg B 153.
[10] DB i.102.
[11] B 153-4.

social upheaval in India. The Buddha's spirit was a stranger to that enthusiasm, without which no one can pose as the champion of the oppressed against the oppressor. Let the state and society remain what they are; the religious man, who as a monk has renounced the world, has no part in its care and occupations. Caste has no value for him, for everything earthly has ceased to affect his interests, but it never occurs to him to exercise his influence for its abolition or for the mitigation of the severity of its rules for those who have lagged behind in worldly surroundings.

Even opening the membership of the Order to all the castes, about which so much has been said by the other scholars, was not a Buddhist innovation:

Before his time, probably long before his time, there were religious orders, which received members of all castes, both males and females.[12]

And equality within the Order was merely formal.

...it seems as if the actual composition of the band, which surrounded the Buddha's person, and the composition of the early Church specially, was by no means in due keeping with the theory of equality... a marked leaning to aristrocracy seems to have lingered in ancient Buddhism as an inheritance from the past.[13]

Here are some examples:

Tapussa and Bhallika, 'the first persons in the world who made their profession of the faith' came from the merchant class.[14] Then, after the Sermon at Benaras,

...the number of believers soon increases. The next convert is Yasa, a scion of a wealthy house at Banaras; his parents and his wife likewise hear the Buddha's discourses and become adherents of the faith as a lay-brother and lay-sister. Numerous friends of Yasa, youths of the most prominent houses in Banaras and the country roundabout, adopt the monastic life.[15]

Then at Uruvela, the performance of miracles after miracles ,beginning with the miracle of overcoming a certain serpent-king) helped the Buddha to win over one thousand Brahmanas, who were formerly ascetics under the leadership of the three brothers of the Kassapa family.[16] From Uruvela the Buddha, accompanied by more than a thousand bhikkhus, went to Rajagaha, the capital of Magadha; and the 'Magadha king, Seniya Bimbisara, surrounded by twelve myriads of Magadha Brahmanas and householders' went to listen to the Buddha and

12 *Ib.* 154.
13 *Ib.* 155.
14 *Ib.* 119.
15 *Ib.* 131.
16 *Ib.* 132.

became his followers.[17] It was here in Rajagaha that Sariputta and Moggallana, two young Brahmanas, who were previously leading a religious life as followers of Sanjaya the *Paribbajaka*, took to the yellow robe;[18] these two converts came eventually to be honoured as first in rank after the Master in the circles of the church.

Thus, we have here some idea of the early converts to Buddhism. As Oldenberg[19] summed up,

> . . . here are young Brahmanas like Sariputta, Moggallana, Kaccana, nobles like Ananda, Rahula, Anuruddha, sons of the greatest merchants and highest municipal dignitaries, like Yasa, invariably men and youths of the most respectable classes of society, and with an education in keeping with their social status.

Again:

> Princes and nobles, Brahmanas and merchants, we find among those who 'took their refuge in the Buddha, the Law, and the Order,' i.e., who made their profession as lay-believers; the wealthy and the aristocrat, it seems, here also exceeded the poor; to reach the humble and wretched, the sorrowing, who endured yet another sorrow than the great universal sorrow of impermanence, was not the Province of Buddhism. Prominent among the 'adherents' stand the two royal friends of the Buddha, Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha and Pasenadi, the ruler of Kosala, both approximately of the same age as the Buddha, and throughout their lives true protectors of his Church.[20]

It must further be remembered that the kings and wealthy merchants had made very costly gifts to the Buddha. Veluvana, the pleasure garden of king Bimbisara, was bestowed by him to the Buddha and his fraternity. 'This was the first *arama* accepted by the Buddha, and a rule was passed allowing monks to accept such an *arama*.'[21]

> It was the dedication of Veluvana which was quoted as precedent by Mahinda, when he decided to accept the Mahameghavana, at Anuradhapura, from Devanampiyatissa.[22]

But the most spectacular of all such gifts was the one made by the great merchant Anathapindika. It was the gift of Jetavana, a pleasure garden near Savatthi.

> When the Buddha accepted Anathapindika's invitation to visit Savatthi, the latter, seeking a suitable place for the Buddha's residence, discovered this park belonging to Jetakumara. When he asked to be allowed to buy it, Jeta's reply was: 'Not even if you could cover the whole place with money.' Anathapindika said that

[17] *Ib.* 133.
[18] *Ib.* 133-4.
[19] *Ib.* 156.
[20] *Ib.* 163.
[21] Malalasekera DPPN ii.936.
[22] *Ib.* ii. 936 n.

he would buy it at that price, and when Jeta answered that he had had no intention of making a bargain, the matter was taken before the Lords of Justice, who decided that if the price mentioned were paid, Anathapindika had the right of purchase. Anathapindika had gold brought down in carts and covered Jetavana with pieces laid side by side. The money brought in the first journey was found insufficient to cover one small spot near the gateway. So Anathapindika sent his servants back for more, but Jeta, inspired by Anathapindika's earnestness, asked to be allowed to give this spot. Anathapindika agreed and Jeta erected there a gateway, with a room over it. Anathapindika built in the grounds dwelling rooms, retiring rooms, store rooms and service halls, halls with fireplaces, closets, cloisters, halls for exercise, wells, bathrooms, ponds, open and roofed sheds, etc.... It is said that...Anathapindika himself spent fifty-four crores in connection with the purchase of the park and the buildings erected in it.[23]

While granting some obvious exaggeration we cannot reject the story altogether.

Not alone the sacred texts, but equally also the monumental records, the reliefs of the great Stupa of Bharhut, recently explored, show how highly celebrated this gift of Ananthapindika's was from the earliest days in the Buddhist Church.[24]

And the Buddha, it is said,[25] rewarded the monarchs, merchants and usurers, by laying down rules that definitely served their class-interest. Interesting examples of these occur in the *Mahavagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka.*

Some of the soldiers of king Bimbisara deserted the army and took shelter in the Buddhist Order. The king was annoyed. To pacify him, the Buddha laid down the rule that no one in the royal service should be allowed to enter the Order.

Now many distinguished warriors thought: 'We who go (to war) and find our delight in fighting, do evil and produce great demerit. Now what shall we do that we may desist from evil-doing and may do good?' Then these warriors thought: 'These Sakyaputtiya Samanas (i.e., the ascetics of the Buddhist Order) lead indeed a virtuous, tranquil, holy life; they speak the truth; they keep the precepts of morality, and are endowed with all virtues. If we could obtain the *pabbajja* (i.e., the preliminary initiation into the Order, preparatory to the *upasampada* or final initiation) with the Sakyaputtiya Samanas, we should desist from evil doing and do good.'

Thus these warriors went to the bhikkhus and asked them for the *pabbajja* ordination; the bhikkhus conferred on them the *pabbajja* and *upasampada* ordinations.

The officers at the head of the army asked the royal soldiers: 'Why, how is it that the warriors N.N. and N.N. are nowhere to be seen?'

'The warriors N.N. and N.N., Lords, have embraced religious life among the bhikkhus.'

[23] *Ib.* i.963-4. [24] Oldenberg B 144.
[25] Sankritayana *DD* (Hindi) 541.

Then the officers at the head of the army were annoyed, murmured, and became angry: 'How can the Sakyaputtiya Samanas ordain persons in the royal service?'

The officers who were at the head of the army told the thing to the Magadha King Seniya Bimbisara. And the Magadha King Seniya Bimbisara asked the officers of justice: 'Tell me, my good Sirs, what punishment does he deserve who ordains a person in the royal service?'

'The *upajjhaya* (i.e., the preceptor under whom one got initiated), Your Majesty, should be beheaded; to him who recites the *kammavacca*, the tongue should be torn out; to those who form the chapter, half of their ribs should be broken.'

Then the Magadha King Seniya Bimbisara went to the place where the Blessed One was; having approached him and having respectfully saluted the Blessed One, he sat down near him. Sitting near him the Magadha King Seniya Bimbisara said to the Blessed One: 'Lord, there are unbelieving kings who are disinclined (to the faith); these might harass the bhikkhus even on trifling occasions. Pray, Lord, let their reverences not confer the *pabbajja* ordination on persons in royal service'....

In consequence of that and on this occasion the Blessed One, after having delivered a religious discourse, thus addressed the bhikkhus: 'Let no one, O Bhikkhus, who is in the royal service, receive the *pabbajja* ordination. He who confers the *pabbajja* ordination (on such a person), is guilty of a *dukkata* offence' (a minor form of offence).[26]

It is true that, as a form of offence, *dukkata* was not as serious as the other forms like *parajika*, etc., mentioned in the *Vinaya Pitaka*. But that does mean that the *dukkata*, as a form of offence within the Order, was not serious. And it is to be noted that the Buddha also declared that the same offence would be incurred by one who would offer *pabbajja* ordination to a debtor or to a runaway slave.

At that time a certain person who was in debt, ran away and was ordained with the bhikkhus. When his creditors saw him, they said, 'There is our debtor; come, let us lead him (to prison).' But some people replied: 'Do not say so, sirs. A decree has been issued by the Magadha King Seniya Bimbisara: 'No one is to do any harm to those who are ordained with the Sakyaputtiya Samanas; well taught is their doctrine; let them lead a holy life for the sake of the complete extinction of suffering.'

People were annoyed, murmured, and became angry: 'Indeed these Sakyaputtiya Samanas are secure from anything; it is not allowed to do anything to them. How can they ordain a debtor?'

They told this thing to the Blessed One.

'Let no debtor, O Bhikkhus, receive the *pabbajja* ordination. He who confers the *pabbajja* ordination (on a debtor), is guilty of a *dukkata* offence.'[27]

Rahula Sankrityayana[28] has observed that such a rule should

[26] SBE xiii 194-6.
[27] *Ib.* xiii. 199.
[28] *DD* (Hindi) 541.

be understood in the context of the fact that in those days, in default of there being any property of the debtor to be attached, the usurers had the legal claim to the very body of the debtor, i.e., to have the debtor as their slave. This is why many a debtor were then rushing to the Buddhist Order to find shelter from the tyrannical law. But the Buddha laid down the law that put an end to such an easy escape. And the attitude to the runaway slaves was no better, whatever king Ajatasattu might have said to the Blessed One in the dialogue we have already quoted. In the *Vinaya Pitaka*[29] it was firmly declared that no runaway slave should be given shelter in the Order: The Buddha is recorded as saying:

> 'Let no slave, O Bhikkhus, receive the *pabbajja* ordination. He who confers the *pabbajja* ordination (on a slave), is guilty of a *dukkata* offence.'

If such texts were really authentic,[30] we have no ground to challenge Oldenberg's claim that the Buddha's metaphysical doctrine of the cessation of universal suffering was not designed in any way to remove the actual sufferings of the toiling masses:

> For the lower order of the people, for those born to toil in manual labour, hardened by the struggle for existence, the announcement of the connection of misery with all forms of existence was not made.[31]

2. The Crucial Question

Both these attitudes to early Buddhism are historically unsatisfactory. It is true that Buddhism, from its early days, was patronised and encouraged by the monarchs and the merchants. It is also true that a considerable number of contemporary aristocrats formed the front-rank associates of the Buddha. Further, as we shall see, Buddhism did help in the expansion of the Magadha empire as well as the Magadha trade. Nevertheless, it would be too crude a view to see in Buddhism only this. The Buddha, in other words, was acting only as an unconscious tool of history, and Buddhism, from its very inception, was destined to become perhaps the biggest socio-religious movement in Indian history. The patronage of the monarchs and the merchants was far too inadequate to explain its phenomenal success. For however much the sacred

[29] SBE xiii. 199.
[30] *Ib.* xiii. intro. xxv.
[31] Oldenberg B 157.

books of Buddhism might have exaggerated the number of common people crowding its ranks, there is no denying the fact that the masses were drawn to it. The Buddha's attitude to the injustices of the caste-system or to the barrenness of the Brahmanical rituals might have been significant factors accounting for its appeal to the people. But the real reason for the success of early Buddhism is to be sought elsewhere. The question is: what was it in early Buddhism that attracted the people and *at the same time* helped the expansion of the trade and the empire? In order to answer this question properly, we have to place Buddhism in its proper historical perspective. When we do so, we come across the astonishing circumstance that the Buddha alone, of all the contemporary prophets, could offer to the people of his times the *illusion* of liberty, equality and fraternity, which, as the inevitable result of the laws of social advance, were being trampled and undermined in *reality*. It is here that we come across the grandeur as well as the limitation of early Buddhism.

3. Uneven Development

Our starting point is the uneven development in Buddhist India:

> 'In the Gangetic valley, about 600 B.C., there coexisted distinct sets of social groups in various stages of development.'[32]

In the *Avadana Sataka*, a Sanskrit Buddhist text referred to the second century A.D.,[33] we come across a remarkable line that sums up the basic features of social development in North-East India during the Buddha's time. It occurs in the story of a group of merchants of the Middle Country of Northern India who went to the Deccan. The king of the Deccan asked them, 'Gentlemen-merchants, who is the king that rules over there (i.e., in Northern India)?' The merchants replied, 'Your Majesty, some areas there are under the rule of the *ganas* while others are under the rule of the monarchs': *deva, kecit desah ganadhinah kecit rajadhinah iti.*[34]

Such, indeed, was the economic and social contrast presented by Buddhist India. Only some areas were then witnessing the rise of state-power and the rule of the monarchs

[32] Kosambi ISIH 140.
[33] ERE viii. 88.
[34] Jayaswal HP i. 31.

while others were still under the administration of the tribal assemblies. Of course, these were not necessarily savage tribes; for some of these had already reached a stage of development at which the tribal organisation had already begun to disintegrate from within.

In order to see the significance of this uneven development for the rise of Buddhism, we have to remember further that the early monarchs, in their frantic drive for conquest and expansion, were systematically annihilating the surviving free tribes. And within the orbits of their direct domination new phenomena, – 'base greed, brutal, sensuality, sordid avarice, selfish plunder of common possessions' – phenomena that were unknown to the tribal life recently left behind were emerging. It was at such a critical period of history that the Buddha came forward and said he had found the real solution to all the problems. He asked the people to join his *samghas*, and the *samghas*, as we are going to see, were modelled on the pattern of the tribal democracies. These were thus meant to be the ideal substitutes for a vanished way of life.

Surprisingly, however, modern scholars, with probably the only notable exceptions of Kosambi,[35] have so far paid little attention to this feature of Indian history during the Buddha's times and its possible ideological reflections in early Buddhism. Even Fick's[36] masterly analysis of the *Jatakas* noticed the tribal organisations in Buddhist India merely in a desultory manner. Of course Rhys Davids[37] spoke of the 'clans' and their customs. However, he did not clearly emphasise the real nature of the clan-organisations, nor did he raise the question of the possible influence of these on the formation of the early Buddhist organisation and ideology. It is true that Jayaswal[38] did boldly argue that the Buddha was consciously looking at the *ganas* or *samghas* of his time as models of his own monastic Order and Majumdar[39] made certain interesting observations on the Buddhist *samghas* from this point of view. But the value of these observations lost their significance because of their misunderstanding of the real meaning of the *ganas* or *samghas*. Jayaswal took them to be ancient republican states while Majumdar thought them to be 'corporate lives,' something too vague to have any meaning at all. Naturally, the question has not occurred to them as to why

[35] JBBRAS xxvii. ii. 180-213; ISIH ch. vi.
[36] SONIBT ch. xi-ii. [37] BI ch. ii.
[38] HP i. 45-55. [39] CLAI 286-328.

the Buddha, in founding his monastic Order, should have at all modelled the *samghas* on the tribal organisations of his times, and how this organisational pattern expressed itself in the ideological sphere.

The standard histories of Indian philosophy makes the situation even more dismal. Generally speaking, they treat early Buddhism as a kind of thing-in-itself—an assortment of noble thoughts and precepts emanating, as it were, from the personal purity, renunciation and asceticism of its founder as a reaction against the malignant growth of the Brahmanical rituals. Radhakrishnan's writings may be taken as fairly typical.

> Any man with imagination will be struck with amazement when he finds that six centuries before Chirst there lived in India a prince second to none before him or after in spiritual detachment, lofty idealism, nobility of life and love for humanity.[40]

Referring to the conditions of the time he said no doubt that there was then 'not one vast Indian empire, but only princes of particular tribes and clans who were trying to form small states.'[41] But this was just a cursory remark and no serious implication was drawn from it for the understanding of the rise of Buddhism. The real conditions, according to him, consisted of spiritual or ideal elements.

> A congeries of conflicting theories and guesses, accepted by some and denied by others, changing with men, reflecting individual characters, emotions and wishes of their authors, filled the air.[42]

Such conditions of mental unrest, according to Radhakrishnan, really accounted for the rise of Buddhism:

> Buddha felt most intensely the inevitable defects of an age of criticism and enlightenment, when ancient faith was undermined and the fancies of theology were disappearing like the shapes of a dream. Men's souls were full of unrest, and desolating discord, and those unable to believe were looking out for a doctrine. The quest of the age was reflected in the spirit of early Buddhism. The Buddha laid his finger on the heart's desire for the true, the good and the beautiful.[43]

This, as poetry, is excellent. But let us leave poetry and turn to facts.

4. The Tribes and the States

Thomas[44] has prepared an excellent note on the geography of early Buddhism:

[40] IP i. 347.
[41] *Ib.* i. 352.
[42] *Ib.*
[43] *Ib.* i. 357.
[44] LB 13. Italics added.

> The home of Buddhism lies in what is now South Behar, west of Bengal and South of the Ganges. This was the country of the Magadhas with the capital at Rajgaha (Rajgir). East of these were the Angas, whose chief city was Campa. North of the Magadhas and on the other side of the Ganges were tribes of Vajjis (chief town Vesali), and still further north the Mallas. West of the Magadhas were the Kasis, whose chief city was Banaras on the Ganges. The kingdom of the Kosalas (capital Savatthi or Sravasti) extended north of the Kasis as far as the Himalayas, and on the northern borders were settled the Sakyas and their neighbours on the east, the Koliyas. *All these are tribal names, and it is misleading to use the terms Anga, Magadha, etc. as if they were names of countries. In* the sixth century B.C., *the Magadhas and Kosalas had developed out of tribal organisations into two rival kingdoms,* the Kasis being absorbed by the Kosalas, and the Angas by the Magadhas. These are all the peoples that have any claim to be connected with the scenes of events in the Buddha's life.

Thomas did not mention the 'forest savages besides higher tribes like the Sakyas';[45] but such lower tribes did not apparently play any great role in the rise of Buddhism. However, in the Buddhist texts we come across the name of another tribe, the Moriyas. The *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*[46] mentioned the Moriyas of Pipphalivana as claiming a share of the Buddha's relics. The share they received was insignificant, perhaps because they were not that important then. Nevertheless, the same Moriyas were soon to play a tremendously important role in Indian history. The most important of the early state-powers—the Maurya state—rose from the Moriyas. Asoka's grandfather Candagutta (Candragupta) was a Moriyan; he was born of the 'queen' of the Moriyan chief.[47] Asoka's mother, too, was a Moriyan 'princess.'[48] It has been suggested that the name came from *mora*, the peacock.[49] This indicates a totemic origin. The association of the Moriyas with the peacock was never completely lost.

> The city which they founded had buildings of blue stone, like the neck of the peacock, and the place always resounded with the cries of peacocks.[50]

It may even be presumed that like the Gotamas (bulls), the Moriyas too originally represented a clan of the Sakya tribe.

> It is said that the Moriyans were originally Sakyan princes of Kapilavatthu, who escaped to the Himalaya regions to save themselves from the attacks of Vidudabha, and established a city there.[51]

What is of importance here is the fact that the people of the

[45] Kosambi ISIH 147.
[46] Rhys Davids DB ii. 189.
[47] Malalasekera DPPN ii. 673.
[48] *Ib.*
[49] *Ib.*
[50] *Ib.*
[51] *Ib.*

great Maurya state were, during the Buddha's times, still in the tribal stage and had not acquired any great prominence.

Thus the age of the Buddha was the time when the organisation of state was beginning to develop within the womb of the tribal organisations, and in the case of the Magadhas and the Kosalas, they had already emerged as such on the ruins of the tribal organisations. However, these two state powers were still surrounded by tribal societies which, as we shall presently see, were not to maintain their independence very long. In this sense the age of the Buddha saw the most momentous social upheavals in the Gangetic valley.

We could obtain a fairly clear picture of the social upheavals by concentrating on the two state-powers already developed, viz. the Kosalas and the Magadhas, and the higher tribes like the Angas, Vajjis, Sakyas, Kasis, Koilyas and Mallas.

We may begin with the Sakyas. The Buddha himself came from them. It is most important to remember that the Sakyas were still in the tribal stage, though at a fairly high level of development. Even some of the important scholars have missed this point. Observed Oldenberg:

> The kingdom of the Sakyas was one of those small aristocratic governments, a number of which had maintained themselves on the outskirts of the greater Indian monarchies.[52]

Added Radhakrishnan:

> He (the Buddha was the heir to the Sakya kingdom.... Impressed by the emptiness of the things of sense, he renounced the ease, power and wealth of the palace to meditate on the eternal, and open for his fellowmen an escape from the meanness of life and the illusions of the flesh.[53]

Such descriptions are misleading. The Sakyas were after all a tribe.[54] There could not have been anything like hereditary kingship among them. As Malalasekera[55] pointed out, 'The Sakyas evidently had no king. Theirs was a republican form of government, probably with a leader elected from time to time.' The description given by Rhys Davids[56] is richer in details:

> The administrative and judicial business of the clan was carried out in public assembly at which young and old were alike present, in their common Mote Hall (*Santhagara*) at Kapilavastu. It was at such a parliament, or palaver, that king Pasenadi's proposition (of getting a bride from the Sakyas for himself) was discussed.

52 B 97.
53 IP i. 347-8.
54 Malalasekera DPPN ii. 969.
55 *Ib.* ii. 970.
56 BI 13-4.

When Ambattha goes to Kapilavastu on business, he goes to the Mote Hall where the Sakyas were then in session. And it is to the Mote Hall of the Mallas that Ananda goes to announce the death of the Buddha, they being then in session there to consider that very matter. A single chief—how, and for what period chosen, we do not know—was elected as office-holder, presiding over the sessions, and, if no sessions were sitting, over the State. He bore the title of *raja*, which must have meant something like the Roman consul, or the Greek archon. We hear nowhere of such a triumvirate as bore corresponding office among the Licchavis, nor of such acts of kingly sovereignty as are ascribed to the real kings mentioned above (i.e., of the Magadhas and the Kosalas). But we hear at one time that Bhaddiya, a young cousin of the Buddha's, was the *raja;* and in another passage Suddhodana, the Buddha's father (who is elsewhere spoken of as a simple citizen,—Suddhodana the Sakya), is called the *raja*.

Rhys Davids has persistently used the word clan to mean tribe and even used the two words almost interchangeably; this, like his use of the word state in describing a really tribal organisation, is liable to create confusion. In actual fact, there were a number of clans within the Sakya tribe, and one of these gave the Buddha his name Gotama (Gautama).

Within the Sakya tribe there were probably several clans, *gottas*. The Buddha himself belonged to the Gotama *gotta*. It has been suggested that this was a Brahmin clan, claiming descent from the ancient *isi* (*risi*) Gotama. The evidence for this suggestion is, however, very meagre. Nowhere do we find the Sakyas calling themselves Brahmins. On the other hand, we find various clans claiming a share of the Buddha's relics on the ground that they, like the Buddha, were khattiyas.[57]

We cannot enter here into any controversy of what the word *khattiya* meant. Evidently it meant warrior, i.e., there was not much of the *varnasrama* implication.[58] Nor can we enter here into the legends concerning the origin of the Sakyas, however fascinating some of their features might be.[59] What concerns us is the tribal constitution of the Sakyas, a significant feature of which, as preserved in the Buddhist texts, was their tribal council, meeting in the *santhagara*. The council, said Morgan,[60] was the great feature of the tribal society. It is thus only to be expected that the other tribes in Buddhist India should have preserved the same institution. We hear of the *santhagara* also of the Mallas and the Licchavis.[61]

The Buddha never forgot the pride of belonging to the Sakya tribe. One of the most typical forms in which the texts

[57] DPPN ii. 969.
[58] See Fick SONIBT 17 A.
[59] Thomas LB ch. i.
[60] AS 84.
[61] Rhys Davids DB i. 113n; Malalasekera DPPN ii. 970n.

referred to him was 'Son of the Sakyas.' He was full of reverence for the ancestral institutions; the tribal institutions—a prominent feature of which was the tribal democracy, the heritage of which the Buddha was himself so proud of, was, during his own life-time, threatened by the emergent state-powers.

Ajatasattu's campaign against the confederacy of the Vajjians may be taken as fairly typical. 'I will root out these Vajjians,' said the king,[62] 'I will destroy the Vajjians, I will bring these Vajjians to utter ruin.' No cause was given for this sinister determination of the king in the Buddhist text. The Jaina text[63] mentioned one: it was simply the greed of the king for a particular elephant and a necklace. This may sound flimsy. Surely there must have been something more than this. We have already discussed this in Chapter III. Kautilya's *Artha-sastra* gives us the clue: There was no prospect for the rising monarchs so long as the free *samghas*—too strong to be destroyed by direct military action—survived in the neighbourhood. Besides, the example of their democracy was dangerous for the monarchies. The destruction of the *samghas* was thus inevitably a part of the policy of the rising state-powers.

"The main struggle was inevitably between Kosala and Magadha; but simultaneously both fought against the tribes."[64] It was, as Kosambi characterised it, a scene of *triangular contest*.[65] What particularly interests us here about the contest is the attacks led by the states against the tribes.

The Kasis were already defeated by the Kosalas.

> The Kosalan drive southwards to Banaras had already become legend. The fabulous king Brahmadatta of Banaras had some success against Kosala, to the extent of capturing and executing its king Dighiti with his queen. The fugitive Kosalan prince Dighavu recovered his kingdom, and perhaps annexed Kasi as Brahmadatta's son-in-law. The same story is told of a Kosalan prince Chatta, who recovered Kosala from Brahmadatta after his father's defeat, refortifying Savatthi to make it impregnable; this prince had run away to Taxila to learn the three *Vedas*. In *Jataka* 303, Dabbasena, king of Kosala, takes Kasi; in *Jataka* 355, it is Vamka. *Jataka* 532 says that king Manoja of Banaras received the submission of Kosala. These names mean little, but the contest, which culminated in Kosalan hegimony over Kasi, seems historical.[66]

It was the same Kosala—presumably during the life-time of the Buddha—that attacked the Sakyas and massacred them, in-

[62] Rhys Davids DB ii. 78.
[63] Basham HDA 69.
[64] Kosambi ISIH 146.
[65] *Ib.* 147.
[66] *Ib.* 147-8.

cluding their women and children. The pretext was revenge for certain marriage fraud. Pasenadi (Prasenajit), the king of Kosala, by far the most powerful of the kings during the Buddha's life time, wanted to have a bride from the Sakyas. Presumably the motive was to win over the Sakyas in diplomatic alliance (see *Arthasastra*). However, true to their tribal tradition, the Sakyas could not agree to the proposal readily. Marriage outside the tribe was against the tribal rule. Yet the Sakyas were naturally afraid to turn down the king's offer unceremoniously. In the meeting of the tribal assembly called to discuss a way out, two different views were expressed. First: 'We live under the suzerainty of the king of Kosala. If we do not give him one of our daughters, great enmity will arise thereby; but if we do give him one, the traditions of our clan will be destroyed thereby. What is to be done?' Second: 'The king is an enemy of ours. Therefore, if we refuse to give him what he demands, he will destroy us. Moreover, he is not of equal birth with ourselves. What is to be done'?[67]

> They cheat him by offering the beautiful Vasabha-Khattiya, daughter of Mahanama Sakya, by a slave woman Naga-Munda; the mother's name combines the names of two well-known savage tribes. Pasenadi is deceived successfully about the girl's birth, and makes her his chief queen for a while. The insult is later discovered but forgiven by Pasenadi on the Buddha's intercession.[68]

However, Vidudabha, the successor to Pasenadi and a son by the same girl, made this an excuse for attacking and slaughtering the Sakyas:

> Having determined to wreck his vengeance on the Sakyas he, on coming to the throne, invaded their country, took their city, and put to death a great number of the members of the clan, wihout distinction of age or sex.[69]

Even the Buddha could not stop this disaster; he had to witness the massacre of his own people by the great power of his times. Incidentally, Vidudabha was no great respector of his father. For treacherously did he betray Pasenadi and ascended the throne of Kosala.

The rise and expansion of the Magada State, too, followed the same pattern of violent extermination of the tribal democracies. The Angas were defeated and brought under Magadha rule even before the Buddha's time. 'We never hear of its having regained

67 JBBRAS xxvi. ii. 184-5.
68 *Ib.* 185.
69 Rhys Davids BI 8.

its former independence, and traditions of war between the two countries are mentioned.'[70] Bimbisara's son Ajatasattu, on ascending the throne, started his ruthless campaign against the Vajjians. And the task of destroying the free tribes, so far as it was left incomplete by the sons of Pasenadi and Bimbisara, was continued by the kings who came after them.

A few surviving traditional *ksatriya* tribes (like those of the Kurus and Pancalas) were systematically wiped out by about 350 B.C. by king Mahapadma Nanda of Magadha, who completed the work of Vidudabha and Ajatasattu. Their internal collapse was certain because of changed economic conditions, but the new tribeless kings could not allow such dangerous example of democracy to survive.[71]

5. New Miseries

The other feature of the history of Buddhist India, important for our purpose to understand the role of early Buddhism, was the emergence of certain new phenomena within the orbits of the state-powers. With the transition from the tribe to the state, the administrative machinery must have passed into its opposite:

... from an organisation of tribes for the free administration of their own affairs it became an organisation for plundering and oppressing their neighbours; and correspondingly, its organs were transformed from instruments of the will of the people into independent organs for ruling and oppressing their own people.[72]

Historically, this was but inevitable. We may follow Fick's analysis of the *Jatakas* and see how actually it did happen in Buddhist India—how, in other words, the people who were only recently free and equal members of the tribes and some of whose neighbours continued to be so, came to be plundered and oppressed by the rising kings.

The ideal of a virtuous Buddhist layman, the king in the old stories does not always follow. Very often we see in him an unrestricted tyrant guided by his own whims and caprices, 'who oppresses and puts down his subjects by punishment, taxes, torture and robbery, as one pounds sugar in a sugar mill, who is as odius to them as a particle of dust in the eyes, as a particle of sand in the rice or as a thorn that has pierced the hand.' To the virtuous mentioned in the *Dasarajadhamme* of the idealised ruler there stands in opposition as many vices; these form, as it were, a legend on the reverse side of the coin, the side which depicts the true picture of the king —drunkenness and cruelty (in the *Khantivadi Jataka;* in the *Culladhammapala Jataka*), corruptibility (in the *Bharu Jataka*), untruthfulness and unrighteousness (in the *Cetiya Jataka*)... Only the

70 Malalasekera DPPN i. 17.
71 Kosambi ISIH 153.
72 Engels OF 268.

virtuousness of his councellors in spiritual and wordly matters... might be in a position to curb his arbitrariness and tyranny. Where this opposite force was absent and the ministers or the *purohita* only helped to carry out the desires of their ruler, there often arose circumstances which forced the people to take recourse to the only method available, namely force, open rebellion.[73]

Fick has illustrated such rebellions by the *Padakusalamanava Jataka* and the *Saccamkira Jataka*. Even some of the neighbouring lower tribes were rebelling against the rule of tyranny. The kings were kept busy in keeping these down:

There is no lack of warlike expeditions which are caused.... *mostly* by the rebellions of the intermediate bordering tribes. Of such insurrections we read very often; the aboriginal tribes driven into the mountains and probably subjugated only in name, gave the Aryan invaders much to do. Not always the troops stationed in the frontiers (*paccante thitayodha*) are sufficient to quell the rebellion. After fighting several battles with the rebels, as narrated in the *Bandhanamohha Jataka*, (who are called *cora*, robbers), they send information to the king that they cannot carry on the war. Then the king collects an army (*balakayam samharitva*) and takes the field.[74]

It is important to remember, as Kosambi[75] has pointed out, that the character of the new army was entirely changed:

Both these kings had developed a new type of army to replace the former armed tribe as a whole, an army without tribal basis which now owed loyalty only to the king... Such an army could not have been maintained without regular taxes and extensive revenues.

The result was the horror of taxation. Fick has given us an idea of this:

If the subjects did not pay willingly, or if the king wanted—as seemed often to happen according to the instances narrated (in the *Jatakas*) ... to harass the people by enhancing the taxes, he sent his officials who had to use force in filling the coffers of the king. These tax-collectors (*balipatiggahakas, niggahakas, balisadhakas*), according to the *Jatakas*, did not play an unimportnt part in public life: how they were looked upon by the people seems to me to be indicated by the conclusions of the *Gagga Jataka*, where the man-eating demon (*yakkha*) whom the Bodhisatta has subdued is given by the king the post of a *balipatiggahaka*.[76]

The use of the name *niggahaka* (lit., the torturer) for the tax-collector tells its own story. Sometimes, such tortures knew no limit. Here is an example given by Fick:[77]

Oppressed with taxes (*balipitita*) the inhabitants lived in the

[73] SONIBT 101-3.
[74] *Ib.* 106.
[75] ISIH 150.
[76] SONIBT 120-1.
[77] *Ib.* 121.

> forest like beasts with their wives and children; where there was once a village, there no village stood any more. The men could not, for fear of the king's people, live in their houses; they surrounded their houses with hedges and went after sunrise to the forest. In the day the king's people (*rajapurisa*) plundered, at night the thieves.

Not infrequently, as the *Jatakas* told us, the king's officers made common cause with the thieves. Fick mentioned other interesting methods by which the kings extracted money from the people. It was indeed a costly proposition to maintain a mercenary army without which state-power could not stabilise and expand.

But extractions not by the kings alone. 'The change in society', as Kosambi[78] said, 'is manifested by a new set of institutions: mortgage, interest, usury.' The story of the development of these new institutions remains still to be reconstructed. The voluminous *Jatakas* will provide the historian with plenty of materials and the *Arthasastra* is there to show how these institutions were eventually stabilised. It is necessary to remember that along with the state-powers — and largely depending upon these—there emerged during the period a strong and influential merchant class, which in turn must have brought in its wake all the social vices characteristic of commercialism.

> This new phenomenon, that control of the state mechanism was to be had by direct violence, marks a profound change. The former need of tribal election or tribal sanction, which still persisted in the Punjab, had vanished in the greater kingdoms of the Gangetic basin. In fact, these kingdoms could not have expanded under tribal conditions. On the other hand, there is no mention of a regular court nobility to replace tribal elders. The implication is that a whole new class of people, who now engaged in trade, the production of commodities, or of surplus grain on family holdings—in a word, the creation of private property—needed their immunity from tribal obstruction and from tribal sharing of the profit. To them, it was most important to have a king who could ensure safety on the road and the new rights of property; not some particular king, but any king who would prevent reversion to tribal laws and property rights in common. This was all the easier because the Magadhan royal state engaged in extensive trade in tax-grain and commodities, through royal officials. The king further claimed all prerogatives of former tribal chiefs; as few as possible of their obligations were retained.[79]

All this is true. Nevertheless, there is another point which, if overlooked, may make us miss the most important factor accounting for the success of early Buddhism. If it was necessary to prevent the people from trying to revert to the tribal laws, it

[78] ISIH 139. [79] *Ib.* 150-1.

was also necessary to offer them some substitute for the lost tribal values of liberty, equality and fraternity which, though not formulated, constituted the cardinal principles of the tribal way of life.[80] Buddhism, we are going to argue, proved to be such a tremendous success precisely because it could offer such a substitute.

In order, therefore, to understand the real success of the message of the Buddha, it is necessary to be clear that, with the emergence of the state-power on the ruins of the tribal societies, the old values of the tribal life must have been destroyed. Here is how Engels[81] described the process:

> The power of these primordial communities had to be broken, and it was broken. But it was broken by influences which from the outset appear to us as a degradation, *a fall from the simple moral grandeur* of the ancient gentile society. The lowest interests—base greed, brutal sensuality, sordid avarice, selfish plunder of common possessions — usher in the new, civilised society, class society; the most outrageous means—theft, rape, deceit and treachery—undermine and topple the old, classless, gentile society. And the new society, during all the 2,500 years of its existence, has never been anything but the development of the small minority at the expense of the exploited and oppressed great majority; and it is so today more than ever before.

Engels was not lamenting the loss of some cherished values. The advance from the tribe to the state was a momentous step forward. Only we should not take too naive a view of this. As Engels said:

> Monogamy was a great historical advance, but at the same time it inaugurated, along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch, lasting until today, *in which every advance is likewise a realative regression,* in which the well-being and development of the one group are attained by the misery and repression of the other.[82]

6. The Kingdom of Truth

Said the Buddha in a *Sutta*:

> I behold the rich in this world, of the goods which they have acquired, in their folly they give nothing to others; they eagerly heap riches together and further and still further they go in their pursuit of enjoyment. The king, although he may have conquered the kingdoms of the earth, although he may be ruler of all land this side the sea, up to the ocean's shore, would, still insatiate, covet that which is beyond the sea. The king and many other men, with desires unsatisfied, fall a prey to death; ... neither relatives nor friends, nor acquaintances, save the dying man; the heirs take his

[80] Engels OF 147.
[81] *Ib.* 163.
[82] *Ib.* 109. Italics added.

property; but he receives the reward of his deeds, no treasures accompany him who dies, nor wife nor child, nor property nor kingdom.[83]

Said the Buddha in another *sutta*:[84]

The princes, who rule kingdoms, rich in treasures and wealth, turn their greed against one another, pandering insatiably to their desires. If these act thus restlessly, swimming in the stream of impermanence, carried along by greed and carnal desire, who then can walk on earth in peace?

The Buddha was not at all exaggerating. With a strong heritage of the tribal morality – the great pride of being a son of the Sakyas – the new realities which he witnessed must have appeared appalling to him. He saw his own people, including women and children, being ruthlessly exterminated. He saw the emergence of base greed and insatiable desire which made the kings to 'float on the ocean of impermanence.' His friend Pasenadi was treacherously betrayed by the son Vidudabha. And surely Pasenadi was the greatest ruler of his times. His other friend, king Bimbisara, was imprisoned and starved to death by the son Ajatasattu. And if the Buddha had lived only a little longer he could have also seen how the same process, the same expression of insatiable greed for riches and power continued to characterise the political history of the age:[85] Ajatasattu was killed by his son Udayabhadda; Udayabhadda was killed by his son Anuruddhaka; Anuruddhaka was killed by his son Munda; Munda was killed by his son Nagadasaka.

Then the citizens said, 'This is a race of parricides,' deposed Nagadasaka, and consecrated the minister Susunaga as king. He reigned for eighteen years, and was succeeded by his son Kalasoka, 'Asoka, the Black.'[86]

It is true that the chronicles might not have been fully dependable. It is also true that the Buddha did not personally witness all these successive parricides and surely he arrived at the fundamentals of his teachings before these events actually took place. But these events were only the manifestations of the new values that followed the rise of state-power and the collapse of the tribal morality. In other words, killing the father for the throne was not accidental but the necessary consequence of the emergence of the new values.

Such tension between king and heir-apparent is taken absolu-

[83] Oldenberg B 64.
[84] *Ib.*
[85] Thomas LB 168-9.
[86] *Ib.* 169.

tely for granted by the *Arthasastra.* The king is there advised (i.17) how to keep a close watch upon the prince, while *Arthasastra* (i.18) advises a prince how to trick his suspicious father.[87]

Confronted, as the Buddha was, with these new forces that began to dominate life, it was only natural for him to want a 'quietude of the heart.' Such a state of quietude was found by withdrawing himself from reality. He meditated long and hard, and at last realised the quietude he had so intensely longed for. But would his fellow beings who had embraced the new forces—would they understand him at all?

'I have penetrated this doctrine which is profound, difficult to perceive and to understand, which brings quietude of heart, which is exalted, which is unattainable by reasoning, abstruse, intelligible (only) to the wise. This people, on the other hand, is given to desire, intent upon desire, delighting in desire. To this people, therefore, who are given to desire, intent upon desire, delighting in desire, the law of causality and the chain of causation will be a matter difficult to understand; most difficult for them to understand will be also the extinction of all *samkharas,* the getting rid of all the substrata (of existence), the destruction of desire, the absence of passion, quietude of heart, *nirvana!* Now if I proclaim the doctrine, and other men are not able to understand my preaching, there would result but weariness and annoyance to me.'

And then the following stanzas, unheard before, occurred to the Blessed One: 'With great pains have I acquired it. Enough! why should I now proclaim it? This doctrine will not be easy to understand to beings that are lost in lust and hatred. Given to lust, surrounded with thick darkness, they will not see what is repugnant (to their minds), abstruse, profound, difficult to perceive, and subtle.'

When the Blessed One pondered over this matter, his mind became inclined to remain in quite, and not to preach the doctrine.[88]

There was, thus, a grave crisis:

Alas! the world perishes! Alas! the world is destroyed! If the mind of the Tathagata, of the holy, of the absolute Sambuddha inclines itself to remain in quiet, and not to preach the doctrine.[89]

The text tells us the story of a divine intervention which induced the Buddha to stand up and preach the doctrine and the people listened.

The people no doubt listened to the Buddha. Only the miracle, the divine intervention, was not really necessary. For the miracle was there already, in the Blessed One's message itself. It was the message of the kingdom of righteousness in a

[87] Kosambi ISIH 150.
[88] SBE xiii. 84-5.
[89] *Ib.* xiii. 86.

world torn to pieces by the new forces of tyranny, oppression and greed, of lust and hatred.

I have gained coolness and have obtained *nirvana*. To found the Kingdom of Truth I go to the city of the Kasis; I will beat the drum of the Immortal in the darkness of this world.[90]

And he went to the city of the Kasis and declared:

The immortal (*amata*) has been won; I will teach you; to you I preach the doctrine. If you walk in the way I show you, you will, ere long, have penetrated to the truth, having yourselves known it and seen it face to face; and you will live in the possession of that highest goal of the holy life, for the sake of which noble youths fully give up the world and go forth into the homeless state.[91]

But where was this Kingdom of Truth which the Buddha thus set out to preach? Significantly enough, he did not look forward, to what had emerged, and was emerging fuller and fuller every day, the pomp and the grandeur of the rising state-powers. Instead, he looked backward, to the tribal collectives, threatened and undermined before his own eyes.

There are two distinct grounds to support this point. First, the memory of the lost collective life ever lingered in the Buddhist tradition and was looked upon as the golden age of the past. Secondly, the Buddha was consciously modelling his Order — his *samgha* — on the surviving tribal democracies. The second of these two grounds is decisive, though the first one has an interest of its own.

Referring to the *Agganna Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, Kosambi[92] observed:

The memory of a classless, undifferentiated society remained as the legend of a golden age when the good earth spontaneously produced ample food without labour because men had neither property nor greed.

Largely the same legend and definitely the same memory of the bliss in the pre-class society may be traced in the *Mahavastu Avadana*. As summed up by Sastri,[93] the origin of kingship in this text is, in essence, as follows:

In the beginning people used to feed on love and live in the abodes which was bliss. Feeding on food which was love and living in abodes which were bliss, they lived thus. And whatever they did was *dhamma*. Then emerged among them the distinction of *varna* (colour): some had good *varna*, some bad. Vanity was thus born and with its birth died *dhamma*. And with it dried up love and

[90] *Ib.* xiii. 91.
[91] *Ib.* xiii. 92-3.
[92] Kosambi ISIH 162.
[93] *BD* (B) 142ff.

honey on which they were so long feeding. They went on in search of new sources of food. They discovered the mushrooms and after that the herbs. Then they discovered *sali-dhana* (a kind of rice-grain). Nobody then had any idea of hoarding. But the idea of hoarding the grain gradually grew in their minds. And the greed for hoarding went on increasing. Along with it dawned the consciousness of the difference between the sexes. To begin with, the idea of pairing was to them a gross violation of morality. Eventually, however, the custom of pairing was stabilised and accepted. And domestic affairs became the concern of the women.

The greed for hoarding went on swelling. They started to cultivate the land which ultimately made the collective ownership of it no longer possible. Land was distributed among the individuals for individual cultivation. Boundaries were determined for the cultivable land of each. It was decided that nobody should infringe upon the other's plot. The arrangement worked for some time.

Later, new complications started to develop. Someone thought, 'Well, this is my land and this much is the quantity of harvest that I reap. But supposing there was a bad crop?' So he resolved: 'Whether this be allowed or not does not matter, I will pounce upon someone else's field and get the grain.' He stole and was caught by a third person. The third person gave him a beating and called him a thief. He, the thief, cried, 'Look brothers, I am being beaten. Look brothers, I am being beaten. This is injustice. This is injustice.'

And thus began theft, untruth and punishment.

Then everybody assembled together and resolved: 'Come, let us elect somebody from amongst ourselves to look after the border of each one's field. He will be strong and intelligent and fair to all. By way of his remuneration, each of us shall pay him a part of our produce. He will punish the criminal and protect the righteous and look after the border of each.'

Thus they elected one among themselves. On the consent of all, he became a *raja*. That is why the *raja* is called a *maha-sammata*, the Great Consent.

Sastri rightly pointed out that in spite of the later distortions introduced into the legend, its archaic essence can be unmistakably recovered. It is this essence we have presented above. And the legend is without parallel in Indian literature outside Buddhism. It has been pointed out that certain *Mahabharata* passages, too, retain the memory of the transition from the pre-class to the class-divided society.[94] However, what deserves to be specially noted about the Buddhist legend is that God, or the Creator, does not find a place in it. An attitude of stark materialism – though a primitive and naive one – pervades the whole of it.

In any case, passages like these show that the memory of the lost collective life was never completely washed away from the Buddhist tradition and that such a life was looked upon as

[94] Dange IPCS 59ff.

the golden age of the past. It was such a life, again, which the Buddha had in mind when he spoke of the Kingdom of Truth or Righteousness. This becomes quite evident when we trace the sources of his *samgha*.

7. Samgha and Primitive Communism

Unlike Christ, the Buddha instituted an Order, or Church, during his own lifetime; and in the course of his long ministry of forty-five years, and as occasion arose, he made a great many regulations for its guidance.[95]

This is true and here we have a crucial point that explains the success of early Buddhism.

This early appearance of a form of associated life strictly governed by law can cause no astonishment.... The monastic orders professing other faiths, preceding and coeval with the Buddha's Order, and, in a not less degree, the common source of all these sects, Brahmanism, have furnished for the formation of a church polity, as they did in the case of dogmatic speculation, a set of ready-made forms, which Buddhism had only to appropriate.[96]

This is not true and it misses the crucial point accounting for the success of early Buddhism.

The Buddha radically departed from the other organisers of monastic groups during or before his times in *making the surviving free tribes of his times the models for his samghas.* The *samghas* were consciously designed by him to be *illusory substitutes for what was being systematically annihilated in reality.*

The *Maha Parinibbana Sutta,* already referred to in Chapter III, gives us the clue. King Ajatasattu was contemplating a determined offensive against the Vajjians. He sent his prime minister, the *brahmana* Vassakara, to the Buddha to seek his blessings. The Buddha did not answer Vassakara directly but addressed himself to Ananda and said:

So long, Ananda, as the Vajjians foregather thus often, and frequent the public meetings of their clan; so long may they be expected not to decline but to prosper.

And in like manner the Buddha enumerated six other conditions that ensured the success of the Vajjians. The prime minister, failing to obtain the Buddha's blessings, left the place. And the text continued:

Now soon after he had gone the Exalted One addressed the

[95] Warren BT 392. [96] Oldenberg B 331-2.

venerable Ananda, and said: 'Go now, Ananda, and assemble in the Service Hall such of the brethren (*bhikkhus*) as live in the neighbourhood of Rājagaha.'

And he did so: and returned to the Exalted One, and informed him, saying: 'The company of the brethren, lord, is assembled, let the Exalted One do as seemeth to him fit.'

And the Exalted One arose, and went to the Service Hall; and when he was seated, he addressed the brethren, and said: 'I will teach you, O mendicants, seven conditions of the welfare of a community. Listen well and attend, and I will speak.'

'Even so, lord,' said the brethren, in assent, to the Exalted One; and he spake as follows:

'So long, O mendicants, as the brethren foregather oft, and frequent the formal meetings of their Order — so long as they meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out in concord the duties of the Order — so long as the brethren shall establish nothing that has not been already prescribed, and abrogate nothing that has been already established, and act in accordance with the rules of the Order as now laid down — so long as the brethren honour and esteem and revere and support the elders of experience and long standing, the fathers and leaders of the Order, and hold it a point of duty to hearken to their words — so long as the brethren fall not under the influence of that craving which, springing up within them, would give rise to renewed existence — so long as the brethren delight in a life of solitude—so long as the brethren so train their mind in self-possession that good men among their fellow disciples shall come to them, and those who have come shall dwell at ease—so long may the brethren be expected, not to decline, but to prosper. So long as these seven conditions shall continue to exist among the brethren, so long as they are well-instructed in these conditions, so long may the brethren be expected not to decline, but to prosper.[97]

The special interest of the passage consists in the fact that the seven conditions mentioned here are identical to the seven conditions which the Buddha, immediately before this sermon, declared to be those that ensured the prosperity of the tribal life of the Vajjians. Thus it is not difficult to see what it was on which the Buddha modelled his Order. It was indeed not an accident that he adopted the name '*samgha*,' meaning the tribal society, for his own Order; and the text, though under an obvious anachronism, virtually admitted the point. 'When I was once staying, O Brahmin,' said the Buddha, 'at Vesali at the Sarandada Shrine, I taught the Vajjians these conditions of welfare.'[98] Evidently, the text presented here a historic truth, though, out of reverence for the Exalted One, it was presented in an inverted manner: the tribal organisation the Blessed One imitated must have been immensely older than the Buddha himself.

[97] Rhys Davids DB ii. 81-2. [98] *Ib.* ii. 80.

Thus, at a critical stage of Indian history, while the free tribes of the times were being ruthlessly exterminated and, within the orbits of the expanding state-powers, people were experiencing the rise of new values on the ruins of tribal equality, the Buddha was modelling his *samghas* on the basic principles of the tribal society and was advising the brethren of his Order to mould their lives according to these principles. This point is crucial. In building up his own *samghas,* the Buddha could provide the people of his times with the illusion of a lost reality, of the dying tribal collective. And it was only the great genius of the Buddha which could have built this coherent and complete illusion. Not only did he successfully build up his *samghas* on the model of the pre-class society, but he took great care to see that the members therein — the *bhikkhus* within the *samghas* — lived a perfectly detached life, i.e., detached from the great historic transformation going on in the society at large, whose course was obviously beyond his power to change. The *bhikkhus* were not to meddle in matters mundane. And within the *samghas,* there remained only one great purpose before them. It was an ideal transformation of the personality, a transformation of the subjective attitude, and, irrespective of what was going on in the actual life, it was, again, a transformation of the personality on the lines of the simple moral grandeur of the pre-class tribal life. As we shall presently see, it is from this point of view alone, we can understand the famous codes of morality formulated by him. No. The Buddha even went farther than that. With all his express distaste for metaphysics, he did develop a grand speculative system which alone could justify the withdrawal into this illusion of the lost equality and righteousness. It raised the concrete sufferings of his days to the rarified atmosphere of a metaphysical principle of universal suffering, along with a magnificient but equally rarified explanation of it.

It was here — in evolving a thoroughly consistent illusion suited to the age — that the contemporary prophets of the Buddha really failed. Makkhali Gosala, as we shall see, could never overcome the feeling of an overwhelming inevitability behind the appalling historic transformations. He saw *niyati* or fate in everything. Shocked by the unscrupulous massacre of the same Vajjians, whose social organisation was proclaimed by the Buddha as ideal for the brethren of his Order, Gosala became a raving lunatic and died one. Others, like

Purana Kassapa, thought it utterly futile to try to distinguish between right and wrong, holy and unholy. Ajita Kesakambali talked cynically of the meaninglessness of morality and metaphysics. Pakudha Kaccayana saw only barrenness in everything. Sanjaya Belatthiputta thought one world-outlook as bad as any other. These were the philosophies of frustration and futility. Barring Mahavira, — whose success, though not as great as that of the Buddha, was nevertheless due to his comparative ability of evolving a proper illusion of the epoch — these were the major prophets of the Buddha's times. It is therefore no wonder that, as narrated in the *Samanna Phala Sutta*,[99] none of them could successfully justify the life of the recluse or explain the positive benefits thereof. Only the Buddha could do it. Because only he could evolve the illusion of the epoch, wonderful in its internal consistency. Thus, the success of the Buddha can be understood only in the background of the failures of his contemporaries. And it is in his *samghas* that we find the key to his success.

We have already seen wherein the Buddha found the model for his *samgha*. But how thoroughly did he imitate his model? To answer this question, we need discuss three crucial problems. These relate to (1) the procedure of entry into the Order, (2) the internal administration of the Order, and (3) the personal or private property within the Order. The main source here is the *Vinaya Pitaka;* but our main guide for understanding the text is Morgan's classical study of ancient society.

In tribal society, one's initiation as a full member of the tribe is preceded by a ritual or ceremony, the essence of which is the simulation of death and rebirth. The young dies as young and is reborn as a full-fledged member of the tribe. This is initiation. In the ancient religions we come across relics of this ritual, though without its original purposiveness. As Thomson[100] remarked, social institutions rendered obsolete by economic progress find a sanctuary in religion. Thus, for example, in the *Aitareya Brahmana*,[101] we come across this death-and-rebirth mime in meticulous detail.

Admission to the Buddhist Order presupposed the performance of what are called the *pabbajja* and *upasampada* ceremonies. These were the two steps towards full-fledged

[99] *Ib.* i. 70.
[100] SAGS i. 66. [101] Keith RVB 103.

membership of the Order, the former being the lower and preparatory to the latter.

> *Pabbajja* (*pravrajya*) means 'going out'; and by this ceremony one goes out from a prior state of life... *Upasampada* means 'arrival,' and is the entry into the circle of the fully accredited members of the *samgha*.[102]

Excepting that the candidate here had to shave his head and change into the yellow robe, there was not much in these to resemble the death-and-rebirth mime either in its tribal or in its petrified, i.e., religious form. Instead of this the most prominent feature, particularly of the *upasampada,* was an elaborate method of obtaining the sanction of all the full-fledged members of the *samgha* for getting the candidate admitted into it. The tribal initiation does not presuppose such popular sanction. Being essentially a kinship organisation, the claim to its membership is determined by descent.

The Buddhist *samgha* was not a kinship organisation. Its membership could not be determined by descent. In short the procedure of admission into the *samghas* could not be modelled on the tribal initiation. This the Buddha knew well. On what did he model it then?

This can be answered by raising a further question: How is membership granted in tribal society when the candidate is *not a natural kin*? It is by adoption, which is always preceded by an extraordinarily elaborate democratic procedure.

'Among the Iroquois,' said Morgan,[103] 'the ceremony of adoption was performed at a public council of the tribe, which turned it practically into a religious rite.' Morgan had first-hand knowledge of this procedure as he was himself adopted by the Hawk clan of the Seneca tribe.[104] This is how he described the procedure:[105]

> After the people had assembled at the council house one of the chiefs made an address giving some account of the person, the reason for his adoption, the name and gens of the person adopting, and the name bestowed upon the novitiate. Two chiefs taking the person by the arms then marched with him through the council house and back, chanting the song of adoption. To this the people responded in musical chorus at the end of each verse. The march continued until the verses were ended, which required three rounds. With this the ceremony concluded ....

[102] ERE vii. 319.
[103] AS 80-1.
[104] EB xv. 802.
[105] AS 81n.

Morgan has not given us the text of the verse. Evidently, these were designed to obtain the popular approval.

We may now consider the Buddhist ceremony and see whether the Iroquois one can throw any light on it. The *Mahavagga*[106] of the *Vinaya Pitaka* gives us the main data. Here are some passages:

> Then the Blessed One ... thus addressed the Bhikkhus: '... I prescribe, O Bhikkhus, that you confer the *upasampada* ordination by a formal act of the Order in which the announcement (*natti*) is followed by three questions.
>
> 'And you ought, O Bhikkhus, to confer the *upasampada* ordination in this way: Let a learned, competent Bhikkhu proclaim the following *natti* (announcement of a resolution) before the *samgha*:
>
> 'Let the *samgha,* reverend sirs, hear me. This person N.N. desires to receive the *upasampada* ordination from the venerable N.N. (i.e., with the venerable N.N. as his *upajjhaya*). If the *samgha* is ready, let the *samgha* confer on N.N. the *upasampada* ordination with N.N. as *upajjhaya.* This is the *natti.*
>
> 'Let the *samgha,* reverend sirs, hear me. This person N.N. desires to receive the *upasampada* ordination from the venerable N.N. The *Samgha* confers on N.N. the *upasampada* ordination with N.N. as *upajjhaya.* Let any one of the venerable brethren who is in favour of the *upasampada* ordination of N.N. with N.N. as *upajjhaya,* be silent, and any one who is not in favour of it, speak.
>
> 'And for the second time I thus speak to you: Let the *samgha*.... (etc. as before).
>
> 'And for the third time I thus speak to you: Let the *samgha*... (etc. as before).
>
> 'N.N. has received the *upasampada* ordination from the *samgha* with N.N. as *upajjhaya.* The *samgha* is in favour of it, therefore it is silent. Thus I understand.'[107]

Later, as the *samghas* began to develop, certain new problems inevitably arose, necessitating new rules to be observed during the *upasampada* ceremony.[108] However, its essential character as an imitation of the tribal adoption was never lost. The following way of obtaining the sanction of the *samgha* always remained the final act of the procedure:

> Then let a learned, competent Bhikkhu proclaim the following *natti* before the *samgha*: 'Let the *samgha,* reverend sirs, hear me. This person N.N. desires to receive the *upasampada* ordination from the venerable N.N.; he is free from the Disqualifications; his alms-bowl and robes are in due state. N.N. asks the *samgha* for the *upasampada* ordination with N.N. as *upajjhaya.* If the *samgha* is ready... (etc. as before).'[109]

Such a procedure of adoption gives us some idea of the kind

[106] i. 28; i. 76.
[107] SBE xiii. 169-70.
[108] *Ib.* xiii. 151-238.
[109] *Ib.* xiii. 233

of democracy the Buddha was trying to enforce within the *samghas*. This becomes clearer when we consider the general rules concerning their internal administration.

That the constitution of the *samghas* was ultra-democratic, is a point already noted by some of our scholars. Majumdar observed:

> The general assembly of the monks constituted the sovereign authority and the procedure of its meetings was laid down with minute exactness.... In the first place, all the fully ordained Bhikkhus in a community were members of the assembly. Every one of them, unless incapacitated for some offence by way of penalty, had a right to vote. No meeting was legal unless all the members entitled to vote were either present, or being absent, formally declared their consent. A minimum number of members that must be present in order that the act may be legal, or, in other words, the rules of a quorum are laid down in the *Mahavagga*.... The assembly having duly met, the mover had first to announce to the assembled Bhikkhus the resolution he was going to propose; this announcement was called *natti*. After the *natti* followed the questions (*kammavaca*) put to the Bhikkhus present if they approved of the resolution. The question was put either once or three times....[110]

And then what happened if the resolution was not ruled out by the *samgha*?

> After the resolution was formally put before the *samgha* once or thrice, as the case might be, it was automatically passed, if the members present kept silent. In case any one spoke against it and there was a difference of opinion, the decision of the majority prevailed. Regular votes were taken, and a taker of votes was formally appointed by the *samgha* for this purpose.[111]

The Buddhist *samghas* did indeed have an ultra-democratic constitution. But such a democratic constitution was not an innovation of the Buddha; it was simply imitation of the tribal democracies.

Jayaswal, albeit his misunderstanding as to the real meaning and nature of the *samghas* or *ganas*, emphasised this point clearly.

> The Buddha was born in a republican people. He had *samgha* neighbours around him, and he grew up amongst them. He called the community which he founded *bhikkhu samgha*, or the Republic of the Bhikkhus. He, probably following his contemporary teachers, adopted the name as well as the constitution of the political *samgha* in founding his religious *samgha*.[112]

The Buddha, as Jayaswal showed, introduced the method

110 CLAI 310-1.
111 *Ib.* 312.
112 HP i. 45.

of counting the members of his Order precisely on the lines of the *samghas* or *ganas*,

At that time the people asked the Bhikkhus who went about for alms: 'How many Bhikkhus are there, reverend sirs?'

The Bhikkhus replied, 'We do not know friends.'

The people were annoyed, murmured, and became angry: 'The Sakyaputtiya Samanas do not even know each other; what good things else will they know?'

They told this thing to the Blessed One.

'I prescribe, O Bhikkhus, that you count the Bhikkhus.'

Now the Bhikkhus thought: 'At what time ought we count the Bhikkhus?' They told this thing to the Blessed One.

'I prescribe, O Bhikkhus, that you count (the Bhikkhus) on the day of *uposatha* by the method of *ganas* (*ganamaggena ganetum*) or that you take the voting tokens (*salaka*).[113]

The crucial point is the use of the words *ganamaggena ganetum*, correctly understood by Jayaswal as counting on the system employed in a *gana*.

Here is an interesting example of the democratic procedure actually observed in the Buddha's own tribe, a procedure which the Buddha was evidently imitating for his *samghas*. When the king of Kosala besieged the capital of the Sakyas and the question of surrender had to be decided upon, they assembled together to ascertain the opinion of the majority:

So the king sent a messenger to the Sakyas, saying 'Sirs, although I have no fondness for you, yet I have no hatred against you. It is all over; so open your gates quickly.' Then the Sakyas said, 'Let us all assemble and deliberate whether we shall open the gates.' When they had assembled, some said, 'Open them,' others advised not doing so. Some said, 'As there are various opinions, we will find out the opinion of the majority.' So they set about voting on the subject.[114]

Examples in the *Vinaya Pitaka* are illustrative of the Buddha's concern for inner-*samgha* democracy. Here are some:

At that time the Chabbaggiya Bhikkhus performed official acts in the following ways: they performed unlawful acts before an incomplete congregation; ... they performed seemingly lawful acts before a complete congregation; they performed acts without a *natti* and with the proclamation (of the *kammavaca*); they performed acts without a proclamation of the *kammavaca*) and with the *natti*; they performed acts without a *natti* and without a proclamation (of the *kammavaca*); they performed acts contrary to the *dhamma;* they performed acts contrary to the Vinaya; they performed acts contrary to the doctrine of the Teacher; and they performed acts against which (the Bhikkhus present) protested, which were unlawful, objectionable, and invalid.

Those Bhikkhus who were moderate, were annoyed, etc. These

113 *Mahavagga* ii. 18.

114 Rockhill LB 118-9.

Bhikkhus told this thing to the Blessed One. 'Is it true, as they say, O Bhikkhus, that the Chabbaggiya Bhikkhus...etc?'

'It is true, Lord, etc....' Having thus rebuked them and delivered a religious discourse, he thus addressed the Bhikkhus:

'If an official act, O Bhikkhus, is performed unlawfully by an incomplete congregation, it is no real act and ought not to be performed etc... If an official act, O Bhikkhus, is performed against which (the Bhikkhus present) protest, which is unlawful, objectionable, and invalid, this is no real act and ought not to be performed.

'There are, O Bhikkhus, six kinds of official acts (which a *samgha* can perform); an unlawful act, an act performed by an incomplete congregation, an act performed by a complete congregation, a seemingly lawful act performed by an incomplete congregation, a seemingly lawful act performed by a complete congregation, a lawful act performed by a complete congregation.

'And which, O Bhikkhus, is an unlawful act? If one performs, O Bhikkhus, a *nattidutiya* act with one *natti,* and does not proclaim a *kammavaca,* such an act is unlawful. If one performs, O Bhikkhus, a *nattidutiya* act with two *nattis* and does not proclaim a *kammavaca* ... with one *kammavaca* and does not propose a *natti* ... with two *kammavacas* and does not propose a *natti,* such an act in unlawful.

'If one performs, O Bhikkhus, a *natticatuttha* act with one *natti* and does not proclaim a *kammavaca,* such an act is unlawful. If one performs, O Bhikkhus, a *natticatuttha* act with two (... three, ... four) *nattis* and does not proclaim a *kammavaca,* such an act is unlawful. If one performs, O Bhikkhus, a *natticatuttha act* with one *kammavaca* (... with two, ... three, ... four *kammavacas*) and does not propose a *natti,* such an act is unlawful. Such acts, O Bhikkhus, are called unlawful acts.

'And which, O Bhikkhus, is an act of an incomplete congregation?

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *nattidutiya* act not all Bhikkhus, as many as are entitled to vote, are present, if the *chanda* (i.e., declaration of consent of an absentee) of those who have to declare their *chanda* has not been conveyed (to the assembly), and if the Bhikkhus present protest, such an act is performed by an incomplete congregation.

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *nattidutiya* act as many Bhikkhus as are entitled to vote, are present, but if the *chanda* of those who have to declare their *chanda* has not been conveyed (to the assembly), and if the Bhikkhus present protest, such an act is performed by an incomplete congregation...

'And which, O Bhikkhus, is an act of a complete congregation?

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *nattidutiya* act as many Bhikkhus as are entitled to vote, are present, if the *chanda* of those who have to declare their *chanda* has been conveyed (to the assembly), and if the Bhikkhus present do not protest, such an act is performed by a complete congregation.

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *natticatuttha act* ... (etc., as in last section).

'Such acts, O Bhikkhus, are called acts performed by complete congregations.

'And which, O Bhikkhus, is a seemingly lawful act performed by an incomplete congregation?

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *nattidutiya* act the *kammavaca* is proclaim-

ed first and the *natti* is proposed afterwards, if not all Bhikkhus, as many as are entitled to vote, are present . . . (etc., the six cases given in this paragraph, of which three refer to *nattidutiya* acts and three to *natticattuttha* acts, differ from those specified above only by the statement added in each of these cases regarding the inverted order of *natti* and *kammavaca*).

'And which, O Bhikkhus, is a seemingly lawful act performed by a complete congregation?

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *nattidutiya* act the *kammavaca* is proclaimed first and the *natti* is proposed afterwards, if as many Bhikkhus as are entitled to vote, are present. . . . (etc. this paragraph stands precisely in the same relation to the paragraph on *an act of a complete congregation* in which the preceding one stands to the paragraph on an act of *an incomplete congregation*). . . .

'And which, O Bhikkhus, is lawful act performed by a complete congregation?

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *nattidutiya* act the *natti* is proposed first and afterwards the act is performed with one *kammavacaka*, if as many Bhikkhus as are entitled to vote, are present, if the *chanda* of those who have to declare their *chanda* has been conveyed (to the assembly), and if the Bhikkhus present do not protest, such an act is lawful and performed by a complete congregation.

'If, O Bhikkhus, at a *natticatuttha* act the *natti* is proposed first and afterwards the act is performed with three *kammavacas*, if as many Bhikkhus as are entitled to vote, etc., such an act is lawful and performed by a complete congregation.[115]

Passages like these have a special interest for us. Readers may look up Jayaswal's work[116] for more examples. While there are a number of admirable studies[117] on the constitution of tribal organisations in Buddhist India, direct historical evidence are meagre. But if the Buddha was really modelling his *samghas* on the principles of the tribal organisations, the *samgha*-laws should, conversely, enable us to infer a great deal about the nature of the tribal organisations themselves.

Early tribal society was not only democratic but also communistic. There was no such thing in it as private or individual ownership of property. But how far did the Buddha go in ensuring these communistic principles of property relations within the *samghas*? Majumdar observed:

. . . the individual in the Buddhist Church was merged in the corporation. . . . The same relation between the individual and the corporation is brought out by the general presumption in the Buddhist Cannon Law that everything belongs to the *samgha* and not to any individual monk, and that the latter can only possess that which has been specifically alloted to him. . . . Even when things were allowed to Bhikkhu for personal use, they were considered as the property of the *samgha*. It is perfectly in keeping with this

[115] SBE xvii. 265-8. [116] HP i. 103-17.
[117] Rhys Davids BI ch. ii; Turnour in JASB vii. 993ff.

doctrine that on the death of a Bhikkhu, the Samgha became the owner of his property.[118]

It would be tedious to quote the long passages of the Buddhist texts which are the basis of this observation. In fact, the whole series of the '*pachittiya* offence involving forfeiture'[119] was based on a clear communistic view of property relations. This will be evident from the comment of Rhys Davids and Oldenberg on the rules:

The following rules, most of which have long ago fallen into abeyance, depend in great measure upon *communistic customs of the ancient fraternity*... At the end of the *vassa* period (rainy season) the *samgha*, or community of brethren in any place, was accustomed to give over to some one of the Bhikkhus such store of robes as it possessed; and it should here be observed that *no Bhikkhu had a separate personal ownership over his robes, though nominally given to him for his own use,* and really his own subject to the rules, they were, technically speaking, the property of the whole *samgha*. The Bhikkhu above referred to then spread the store of robes out to dry; and afterwards satisfied out of it the wants of any brother whose robes, through the dampness of the season or other causes, had become spoiled.[120]

It is evident that the Buddha felt strongly against private property within the Order. This was but logical. The tyranny of pain from which he sought an escape, as he was never tired of repeating, was caused by greed that he witnessed all round him. The power of private property, the Buddha knew, lay at the root of this greed. He was powerless to reform the society, but within the Order – the ideal *samgha* – his power was supreme. He would not permit it to be dictated by the power of gold.

Whatsoever Bhikkhu shall receive gold or silver, or get someone to receive it for him, or allow it to be kept in deposit for him—that is a *pacittiya* offence involving forfeiture. Whatsoever Bhikkhu shall engage in any one of the various transactions in which silver is used—that is a *pacittiya* offence involving forfeiture.[121]

The remedies suggested have their own interest:

The guilty Bhikkhu has to give up the gold or silver to the community (*samgha*) ... Then when an *aramika* or an *upasaka* comes, it is to be given to him, to buy ghee or oil with it for the *samgha;* and whatever is bought is the common property of all the *samgha*, save the guilty Bhikkhu. Should the layman object to undertake the spending of the gold or silver, he is to be asked to throw it away. Or, if this cannot be managed, then, as a last resource some Bhikkhu is to be formally appointed Bullion-remover,

118 CLAI 316-8.
119 SBE xiii. 18.
120 *Ib.* xiii. 18n. Italics added.
121 *Ib.* xiii. 26.

and he is to go and throw it away somewhere, without making any mark at the place.[122]

More examples like this[123] are there. We have already seen how scholars like Rhys Davids and Oldenberg found it necessary to use the words 'communistic custom' to refer to the rules concerning the role of property within the Order. Even Majumdar[124] spoke of the 'communistic theory of property' of early Buddhism. What is not discussed, however, is: Wherefrom did the Buddha get such a theory and why did he lay so much emphasis on it?

8. A Religion Without God

'The family, as well as God,' said Thomson, 'goes hand in hand with private property'.[125] As far as early Buddhism is concerned, it is remarkable that with hardly any respect for private property, it did not reveal any sort of faith in God. The Buddha, like his contemporary Mahavira[126] of the Licchavi tribe, not only did not believe in God, but offered a series of arguments against His existence.

But this point needs a little clarification. The following comment of Gaden[127] will show that modern scholars are not unanimous in attributing conscious atheism to the Buddha:

> It is probably an erroneous view of the original teaching of Gautama Buddha which explains his attitude as entirely and of set purpose atheistic; as construing the universe in a materialistic sense, and denying the existence of a God. That he interpreted the universe in the sense indicated is in all probability true; and his views in this respect were derived from the ancient doctrine of the Sankhya philosophy, which in India professed to explain everything in terms of soul and matter (*purusa* and *prakriti*), and to have no need for the intervention of a divine power. The latter view, however—that the founder of Buddhism intended to give expression to distinctly atheistic views—seems to be a mistaken inference from the response which he is recorded in the Buddhist books to have given to the questioning of his disciples with regard to another world, and his refusal to offer any definite instruction on the spiritual and unseen, or to illuminate, with any ray of light which he was competent to give, the uncertainty and darkness of the unknown realm that lay beyond the touch of sense.

It is difficult to reconcile the two aspects of this comment. If the Buddha did accept the materialism of original Sankhya,

122 *Ib.*
123 *Cullavagga* vi. 15.
124 CLAI 319.
125 Thomson SAGS i. 85.
126 Dasgupta HIP i. 203ff.
127 ERE vi. 269-70.

he must have as well adopted the unquestioned atheism of the system, atheism being a natural corollary of the materialistic view of the universe. However, Gaden's doubt arose from a different circumstance altogether.

The actual redaction of the sacred books of Buddhism, as we possess these, took place many centuries after the Buddha. This circumstance raises the question, how far can we rely on these texts as representing the actual views of the Buddha himself. As regards the authenticity of the anti-theistic arguments, however, the situation is even worse. For these are not found even in the early canonical literatures. We first come across these in as late a text as the *Buddhacarita* of Asvaghosa (first century A.D.). In the earlier texts, we find the Buddha maintaining an inexplicable silence on questions concerning God and the other world. Modern scholars have interpreted the significance of this silence in various ways. Gaden[128] offered the following:

> The inference, however, that he intended to imply personal disbelief in the supernatural and in the existence of a God, and to urge or enjoin this upon his disciples, is certainly mistaken... The position which it was his purpose to adopt was neither atheistic, nor, in the strict sense of the term, agnostic. But for his hearers it was immaterial whether the reply were in the affirmative or negative; and speculation on the subject was discouraged or forbidden, lest it should impair or destroy that firm spirit of self-reliance which it was his object to arouse in their hearts... He simply refuses to communicate to his disciples knowledge which he judges to be needless for practical life, and the consideration of which would only minister to a harmful curiosity anxious to speculate on matters beyond human ken.

It is not difficult to see how such an interpretation of the Buddha's silence is based on a rather light view of a really crucial question. Since our prophet repeatedly announced himself as fully enlightened, and even omniscient – the *tathagata* or the *buddha* – there is no reason to imagine that he was himself in any doubt as to the question of God. If, in spite of this, he considered it superfluous for his disciples to speculate on God, it only proves that he did not himself have any belief in God. It was not possible for one to believe in God and yet to consider His existence as something irrelevant to human destiny. It is true that the Buddha always strove to make his disciples concentrate on the practical problem of emancipation from misery and considered metaphysical discussions as self-deceptions. Nevertheless, he did formulate the minimum theoretical basis for this

128 *Ib.* vi. 270.

practical programme and, as we shall presently see, God had absolutely no place in it. This shows that the Buddha himself could not have maintained a neutral attitude to the existence of God. Evidently, he did not want his disciples to waste time and energy speculating on the non-existent.

It is from this point of view that the other scholars attributed to the Buddha a consciously atheistic attitude. 'Buddhism,' said Vallee Poussion,[129] 'in so far as it is a philosophic system, is radically averse to the idea of a Supreme Being – of a God, in the Western sense of the word.' He rightly points out that in Buddhism the principle of *karma* played the part ordinarily attributed to the Supreme Being.

> But, as a general rule, retribution for deeds is believed to operate automatically by reason of an energy called the *indestructible,* and the system is therefore atheistic because it does away with the thought of a personal Being who would scrutinise 'the book of debts' of which their treatises sometimes speak.[130]

Thus, apart from the silence of the Buddha, the very structure of his philosophy made belief in God a superfluous exercise.

We can thus reasonably assume that Asvaghosa, in the *Buddhacarita,* remained true to the original teachings of the Buddha in attributing to him a series of anti-theistic arguments. These arguments might not have been personally expounded by the Buddha himself; nevertheless, these must have followed from his original teaching as the necessary corollaries thereof. Here are some examples:

> If the world had been made by God, there should be no change nor destruction, there should be no such thing as sorrow or calamity, as right or wrong, seeing that all things, pure and impure, must come from Him. If sorrow and joy, love and hate, which spring up in all conscious beings, be the work of God, He Himself must be capable of sorrow and joy, love and hatred, and if He has these, how can He be said to be perfect? If God be the maker, and if all beings have to submit silently to their maker's power, what would be the use of practising virtue? The doing of right or wrong would be the same, as all deeds are His making and must be the same with their maker. But if sorrow and suffering are attributed to another cause, then there would be something of which God is not the cause. Why, then, should not all that exist be uncaused too? Again, if God be the maker, He acts either with or without a purpose. If He acts with a purpose, He cannot be said to be all perfect, for a purpose necessarily implies satisfaction of a want. If He acts without a purpose, He must be like the lunatic or suckling babe. Besides, if God be the maker, why should not people reverently submit to Him, why should they offer supplications to Him when sorely pressed

[129] ERE ii. 183. [130] *Ib.*

by necessity? And why should people adore more gods than one? Thus the idea of God is proved false by rational argument, and all such contradictory assertions should be exposed.[131]

The Buddha, according to the *Buddhacarita,* followed the same line of argument to disprove the possible existence of 'the absolute, the unconditioned, the unknowable behind all appearances:'

Said the Blessed One to Anathapindika: 'If by the absolute is meant something out of relation to all known things, its existence cannot be established by any reasoning (*hetu vidya sastra*). How can we know that anything unrelated to other things exists at all? The whole universe, as we know it, is a system of relations: we know nothing that is, or can be, unrelated. How can that which depends on nothing and is related to nothing produce things which are related to one another and depend for their existence upon one another? Again, the absolute is one or many. If it be only one, how can it be the cause of the different things which originate, as we know, from different causes? If there be as many different absolutes as there are things, how can the latter be related to one another? If the absolute pervades all things and fills all space, then it cannot also make them, for there is nothing to make. Further, if the absolute is devoid of all qualities (*nirguna*), all things arising from it ought likewise to be devoid of qualities. But in reality all things in the world are circumscribed throughout by qualities. Hence the absolute cannot be their cause. If the absolute be considered to be different from the qualities, how does it continually create the things possessing such qualities and manifest itself in them? Again, if the absolute be unchangeable, all things should be unchangeable too, for the effect cannot differ in nature from the cause. But all things in the world undergo change and decay. How then can the absolute be unchangeable? Moreover, if the absolute which pervades all is the cause of everything, why should we seek liberation? For we ourselves possess this absolute and must patiently endure every suffering and sorrow incessantly created by the absolute.'[132]

It is not our purpose here to assess the logical merit of these anti-theistic arguments. What interests us, primarily, is the question how the Buddha could, in the face of this unambiguous denial of the existence of God, initiate such a powerful religious movement? Defining religion as essentially a belief in God, some of the modern theologians[133] have naturally found it difficult to explain this peculiar phenomenon, namely, Buddhism as a religion without God. Obviously, the essence of religion is to be sought elsewhere. Marx[134] explained the essence of religion thus:

"*Man makes religion,* religion does not make man ... But *man*

131 Radhakrishnan IP i. 456 n.
132 *Ib.* i. 457 n.
133 Martineau SR i. 1-2.
134 Marx & Engels OR 41-2.

is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, *a reversed world-consciousness,* because they are a *reversed world.* Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur,* its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification ... *Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people. The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is required for their *real* happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the *demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.* The criticism of religion is therefore *in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe,* the *halo* of which is religion.

We have here all the clues not only to the success of the Buddha but also to the failures of his contemporary prophets.

The age of the Buddha was an age when, as a result of the development of the forces of production, the northern regions of India were witnessing the rise of ruthless state-powers on the ruins of the tribal societies. Trade and war were creating unheard of miseries in the lives of the peoples; the greed for private property knew no bounds. Nevertheless, the productive forces were not developed enough to provide plenty for all. Rather, the further development of the productive forces, which alone could eventually lead to *real* happiness, must have then presupposed a more ruthless form of exploitation and all the miseries it entailed. Under these circumstances, 'the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions' was historically absurd. The other alternative, — in fact the only possible one at the time — was to create the right type of illusion for the epoch — 'its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification.' And the Buddha did evolve it, — 'the spirit of a spiritless situation.'

In the *Theragatha,*[135] Sunita narrated the story of his conversion:

I have come of a humble family, I was poor and needy. The work which I performed was lowly, sweeping the withered flowers ... I was despised of men, looked down upon and lightly esteemed. With submissive mien I showed respect to many. Then I beheld the Buddha with his band of monks, as he passed, the great hero, into the most important town of Magadha. Then I cast away my burden and ran to bow myself in reverence before him. From pity for me he halted, that highest among men. Then I bowed myself at the Master's feet, stepped up to him and begged him, the highest among

[135] Oldenberg B 157.

all beings, to accept me as a monk. Then said unto me the gracious Master, the compassionator of all worlds: 'Come hither, O monk'. That was the initiation which I received.

In the *Therigatha*,[136] again, Mutta, the daughter of a poor Brahmin of Kosala who, on coming of age, had been given to a hunchbacked Brahmana, sang in exaltation of her own release the embrace of Buddhism brought her:

> O free, indeed! O gloriously free
> Am I in freedom from three crooked things:
> From quern, from mortar, from my crookback'd lord!
> Ay, but I'm free from rebirth and from death,
> And all that dragged me back is hurled away.

Sumangalamata,[137] too, sang of her freedom:

> O woman well set free! how free am I,
> How thoroughly free from kitchen drudgery!
> Me stained and squallid 'mong my cooking-pots
> My brutal husband ranked as even less
> Than the sunshades he sits and weaves away,
> Purged now of all my former lust and hate,
> I dwell, musing at ease beneath the shade
> Of spreading boughs — O, but 'tis well with me.

These are only a few stray instances of the 'sigh of the oppressed creatures, the heart of a heartless world.' But early Buddhism was actually so in a much deeper sense. It fostered a sense of equality and *dhamma* among a people cruelly deprived of these in their actual existence. This is borne out not merely by an analysis of the organisational principles of the *samghas* but also by the very theoretical basis of early Buddhism.

9. The Theoretical Basis

Observed Kern:[138]

> When the Buddha had taken possession of the seat of full-enlightenment, he evolved from within two formulas, ever since revealed by him to all beings, and represented as the fundamental truths of his teachings. These formulas are the four *arya satyas* and the twelvefold *pratitya samutpada*.

The four *arya satyas* are commonly referred to as the Four Noble Truths. These were connected with the problem of suffering. The *pratitya samutpada* was an exposition of the chain of causes and effects meant to lay bare the roots of evil.

'It is not difficult to see,' added Kern,[139] 'that these four

136 Mrs Rhys Davids PEB i. 115.
137 *Ib.* i. 25.
138 MIB 46.
139 *Ib.* 46-7.

satyas (truths) are nothing else but the four cardinal articles of Indian medical science, applied to the spiritual healing of mankind.' Again, the *pratitya samutpada* 'stands to the four *satyas* in the same relation as pathology to the whole system of medical science.' Kern referred to a passage of the *Lalita Vistara* showing that this 'connection of the *arya satyas* with medical science was apparently not unknown to the Buddhists themselves.

The Buddha looked upon the sufferings of his age as a sickness, a disease. In suggesting the remedy, he even wanted to proceed according to the principles of the medical science of his times. However, even though he announced himself a *tathagata*, we do not expect him to have diagonised the real social roots of the disease, i.e. to have analysed the tremendous historic transformations going on before his eyes: why the stupendous progress in the productive technique was bringing with it the most awful human miseries and moral degradations. Historically speaking, what was left for him was to transform the *real* problem into an *ideal* one, to interpret the objective phenomenon in subjective terms; in short, to produce 'a reversed world-consciousness.' The result was the transformation of the mass misery of the age into a metaphysics of misery. Early Buddhism, thus, became the most perfect *illusion of the epoch.*

> Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with *a false consciousness*. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces. Because it is a process of thought; he derives its form as well as its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material, which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, and does not investigate further for a more remote source independent of thought; indeed this is a matter of course to him, because, as all action is *mediated* by thought, it appears to him to be ultimately *based* upon thought.[140]

Every epoch has its false consciousness which, in fact, becomes the major illusion of that epoch.[141] The false consciousness underlying early Buddhism became the ideology – the illusion par excellence – of the age of the Buddha. It is from this point of view that we propose to review the four *arya satyas* as well as the doctrine of the *pratitya samutpada*.

According to the *Mahavagga*, which 'contains the oldest version accessible to us now and, most probably, for ever, of

[140] Marx & Engels SC 541. [141] Thomson SAGS ii. 342ff.

what the Buddhist fraternity deemed to be the history of their Master's life in its most important period,'[142] the Buddha, before he came on the scene with his message of redeeming the world of miseries, withdrew himself from the actual world, 'sat cross-legged at the foot of the *bodhi-tree* (the tree of knowledge) uninterruptedly during seven days, enjoying the bliss of emancipation.'[143]

According to the text, the Buddha, before he set out to preach his doctrine, repeated four times this feat of the seven days' withdrawal from the real world.[144] Evidently, this is how he derived his ideas, from 'pure thought.' The *Dhamma Cakka Pavattana Sutta* confirmed the point:

> That this was the noble truth concerning sorrow, was not, O Bhikkhus, among the doctrines handed down, but there arose within me the eye, there arose the knowledge, there arose the understanding, there arose the wisdom, there arose the light.
>
> And, again, O Bhikkhus, that I should comprehend that this was the noble truth concerning sorrow, though it was not among the doctrines handed down, there arose within me the eye, there arose the knowledge, there arose the understanding, there arose the wisdom, there arose the light.
>
> And again, O Bhikkhus, that I had comprehended that this was the noble truth concerning sorrow, though it was not among the doctrines handed down, there arose within me the eye, there arose the knowledge, there arose the understanding, there arose the wisdom, there arose the light.[145]

And so on. The text repeated the same thing over each of the four noble truths. However, the fact that everything about these *arya satyas* was concerned with the tyranny of suffering, and further, that these truths were formulated at a critical period of history which actually witnessed the tyranny of the state-power and private property and the fact that people around him were actually floating on the ocean of misery, shows that the real motive force that impelled the Buddha to formulate these truths did not arise from pure thought. He saw the power of wealth and the insatiable greed it created. He saw his great friend King Bimbisara starved to death by prince Ajatasattu. He saw the throne of Kosala washed by the blood of his own kinsmen. Proud as he always was of his own tribal heritage, the new phenomena around him pained and appalled him. In short, the problem he was trying to solve did not arise from his own thoughts. Yet he was hardly exaggerating when he said that there arose within him 'the eye, the wisdom, the light'; how-

[142] SBE xiii. 73 n.
[143] *Ib.* xiii. 74.
[144] Oldenberg B 114.
[145] SBE xi. 150-1.

ever, this applied only to the solution he suggested. For he withdrew within himself for an explanation of suffering and the path that led to a cessation of it.

The Four Noble Truths, as explanied by him in his famous Sermon at Banaras, ran thus:

This, O monks, is the sacred truth of suffering: Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering; to be united with the unloved is suffering, to be separated from the loved is suffering; not to obtain what one desires is suffering; in short the five-fold clinging (to the earthly) is suffering.

This, O monks, is the sacred truth of the origin of suffering: it is the thirst (for being), which leads from birth to birth, together with lust and desire, which finds gratification here and there: the thirst for pleasures, the thirst for being, the thirst for power.

This, O monks, is the sacred truth of the extinction of suffering: the extinction of this thirst by complete annihilation of desire, letting it go, expelling it, separating oneself from it, giving it no room.

This, O monks, is the sacred truth of the path which leads to the extinction of suffering. It is this sacred eight-fold path, to wit: Right Faith, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Thought, Right Self-concentration.

This is the sacred truth of suffering. Thus my eye, O monks, was opened to those conceptions, which no one had comprehended before, and my judgment, cognition, intuition, and vision were opened. 'It is necessary to understand this sacred truth of suffering.' 'I have comprehended this sacred truth of suffering.' Thus, O monks, my eye was opened to these conceptions, which no one had comprehended before, and my judgment, cognition, intuition, and vision were opened.

(Similar passages regarding the other three truths).[146]

This is how the Buddha gave a completely subjective turn to the most oppressive problems of his age; he raised the concrete material sufferings of his fellow beings to a universal principle of eternal suffering, a kind of ideal or metaphysical suffering:

The pilgrimage (*samsara*: earthly existences) of beings has its beginning in eternity. No opening can be discovered, from which proceeding, creatures, mazed in ignorance, fettered by a thirst for being, stray and wander. What think ye, disciples, whether is more, the water which is in the four great oceans, or the tears which have flown from you and have been shed by you, while ye strayed and wandered on this long pilgrimage and sorrowed and wept, because that was your portion which ye abhorred and that which ye loved was not your portion? A mother's death, a father's death, or brother's death, or sister's death, a son's death, a daughter's death, the loss of relations, the loss of property, all this have ye experienced through long ages, and while ye experienced this through long ages, more tears have flown from you and have been shed by you, while ye strayed and wandered on this long pilgrimage, and sorrowed and wept, because that was your portion which ye abhorred, and that which

[146] Oldenberg B 128-9.

ye loved was not your portion, than all the water which is in the four great oceans.[147]

Before such a story of the beginningless, fabulous and fantastic misery, the actual miseries arising from the new social conditions paled into insignificance. The cause of this universal, metaphysical misery was not to be sought in the material world. For the cause had to be equally metaphysical and the Buddha found it in the very craving for existence – the will to be born, the thirst for being. But he could not stop there. In order to evolve a religion proper, an ideal protest against the actual conditions, the Buddha had to move further forward with a message of deliverance from misery. He proclaimed that the sufferings could be overcome and that there was a definite way out. But what could be the way out while misery was the precondition of existence itself? It was here that the objective reality left its indirect stamp on the teachings of the great Master. He did not suggest self-annihilation. He did not suggest any kind of ascetic self-mortification, which he had always looked upon as 'painful, unworthy and unprofitable.'[148] Instead he suggested the revival, though ideally, of the simple morality of the gentile society. He spoke of right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought, right self-concentration – values, as we can easily judge from the *Jatakas*, which were being ruthlessly undermined in contemporary society. And the Buddha presumably knew how futile it was to talk of practising all these in the world he lived in. So he asked the people to take the *pabbajja* and the *upasampada* ordinations, i.e. 'to go out' of the actual society and 'to arrive at' the life of the *samghas*. Within the *samghas* things were different. Modelled on the pre-class society, these alone could offer the scope for practising the instinctive morality of the tribal life. The *samghas*, as classless societies within the bosom of the class society, were but ideal substitutes for the vanished realities. This explains how the conception of the *samghas* fitted so well with the general metaphysics of suffering: the two together made the illusion complete.

The Buddha went into some details over his second noble truth, namely, the cause of suffering. It is not difficult to see why he felt the necessity for doing so. The question concerning the cause of suffering remained the Achilles' Heel of his whole metaphysics of suffering. The basis of such an imposing super-

[147] *Ib.* 216-7. [148] SBE xi. 147

structure would have crumbled down had he failed to argue convincingly that the real cause of the actual sufferings was to be sought somewhere outside the concrete material world. Otherwise the people would have taken recourse to violence instead. Thus it was necessary for the Buddha to fortify his second noble truth as securely as possible. This led him to formulate the other fundamental of his theoretical teachings, the doctrine of the *pratitya samutpada*. In the *Mahavagga* the doctrine was summed up thus:

> Then the Blessed One during the first watch of the night fixed his mind upon the chain of causation, in direct and in reverse order: 'From ignorance (*avidya*) spring the *samkharas* (productions), from the *samkharas* spring consciousness, from consciousness spring name-and-form, from name-and-form spring the six provinces (of the six senses), from the six provinces springs contact, from contact springs sensation, from sensation springs thirst (desire), from thirst springs attachment, from attachment springs existence, from existence springs birth, from birth spring old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair. Such is the origination of this whole mass of suffering. Again, by the destruction of ignorance, which consists in the complete absence of lust, the *samkharas* are destroyed, by the destruction of the *samkharas* consciousness is destroyed, by the destruction of consciousness name-and-form are destroyed, by the destruction of name-and-form the six provinces are destroyed, by the destruction of the six provinces contact is destroyed, by the destruction of contact sensation is destroyed, by the destruction of sensation thirst is destroyed, by the destruction of thirst attachment is destroyed, by the destruction of attachment existence is destroyed, by the destruction of existence birth is destroyed, by the destruction of birth old age, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair are destroyed. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.[149]

Thus, with all his express distate for metaphysical speculations, the Buddha laid the foundation for a grand system of speculative metaphysics. And like all systems of metaphysics, it also created a halo in the brightness of which all the details of felt experience lost their reality and meaning. The ultimate cause of all human sufferings was traced to *avidya* or ignorance, i.e. the sufferings became the phantom of imagination. The problem was solved simply by removing it from the realm of reality.

10. The Buddha and His Contemporaries

Said Basham:[150]

> Throughout the Pali canon the teaching of the Buddha and the

[149] *Ib.* xiii. 75-8.

[150] HDA 10.

activities and discipline of his Order are contrasted with the doctrines and practices of six other teachers and their followers who are represented as the Buddha's contemporaries, and were doubtless, like the Buddha himself, inspired by the wave of dissatisfaction with the system of orthodox Brahmanism, which seems to have swept over the Ganges valley in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.

This is true, with one important reservation. That Buddhist India was swept by dissatisfaction is a fact. It is also a fact that the Buddha along with all his contemporaries protested against it though in different ways. But the cause attributed to it by Basham is not true. How far the picture of the Gangetic valley being invaded by 'orthodox Brahmanism' corresponded to actual reality might itself be an open question. How far, again, this orthodox Brahmanism caused great popular dissatisfaction is still more conjectural. The *Jatakas* and the early canonical literatures fail to provide any clear picture of these. This does not mean that the Buddha did not concern himself with orthodox Brahmanism or that he did not preach against it. In the *Ambattha Sutta* he argued against the caste-system, in the *Kutadanta Sutta* against animal sacrifice, and in the *Tevijja Sutta* against the knowledge of the three *Vedas*. However, a comprehensive survey of the canonical literatures as a whole distinctly shows that all these presented only subsidiary problems for him, or more properly, appeared to him to be but ineffectual solutions to the great problem with which he was so much obsessed. The great problem was rather that of the 'sea of human suffering,' 'of human tears becoming more colossal than all the waters of the four great oceans put together.' The Buddha never suggested that 'orthodox Brahmanism' was at the root of it nor did the great bulk of the *Jataka* stories reveal a social reality of the tyranny of 'orthodox Brahmanism.' The fact is that the spread of 'orthodox Brahmanism,' whatever it might have concretely meant, had often served our historians as a convenient hypothesis that enabled them to avoid a really objective or materialistic analysis of the historical factor — the rise of class society with all its ruthlessness. We have tried to argue how this is crucial for the understanding of the success of the Buddha. Conversely, the same method should help us to understand the failure of his contemporaries.

Excepting Mahavira, whose success was practically negligible compared to that of the Buddha, the prophets and philosophers of the Buddha's times were but failures. The clue to this is to be found in a peculiar characteristic of the transition

from the pre-class to the class-divided society, namely an appearance of spontaneity and a complete lack of consciousness of this transition:

> In the socialist revolution the development of the new relations of production and productive forces is not a spontaneous process, as under capitalism, but takes place consciously. Going still further back to the transition from ancient society to feudalism, it could be shown that feudal relations developed even less consciously, more spontaneously than capitalist relations in the ensuing epoch; and in the transition from primitive communism to ancient society the same feature can be observed to an even greater degree.[151]

One of the consequences of this spontaneity and lack of consciousness must have been the sheer impossibility of understanding the real nature and cause of the change on the part of those who wanted to understand it.

The philosophers of the Buddhist India wanted to understand the universe, i.e. the world they were living in. This universe must have appeared to them as peculiarly baffling because the human relations in it were already topsyturvy. They saw the ancestral institutions falling down to pieces and giving place to the new forces of injustice and untruth. The development of the productive power,[152] which was at the root of all these changes, must have been imperceptible to them, or, if perceived at all, must have appeared as having no connection with the human degradations which was all that they saw. Yet they wanted to understand the reality and the result was a bewildering cluster of frustrated ideas. Only the Buddha avoided this, not because he had found the right answer to the real question but because he found the right illusion — the right religion — to replace reality.

Probably the Buddha himself understood this, though in his own way. When the news of the death of Mahavira was brought to him by Cunda and he was told that the followers of Mahavira had already started fighting among themselves, he commented:

> To what extent, Cunda, there now are teachers arisen in the world, I cannot discern any teacher, who has attained to such a leading position in renown and support as I have. To what extent, Cunda, there now are Orders and companies arisen in the world, I cannot discern any one that has attained to such a leading position in renown and support as the Order of the Bhikkhus. If any one, in describing a religion as in every way successful, in every respect complete, neither defective nor redundant, well set forth in all its full extent, were to be speaking rightly, it is this religion that he would be describing.[153]

151 Thomson SAGS ii. 179.
152 Kosambi ISIH ch. vi.
153 Rhys Davids DB iii. 118.

It would be wrong to look at this as mere bragging. He offered definite reasons to consider his religion to be in every respect complete. He said that unlike his contemporaries, he wanted his followers to turn away from 'opinions concerning the beginning and hereafter of things'[154] and concentrate exclusively on the methods of transforming the subjective states:

> A new doctrine, Cunda, do I teach for subduing the mental intoxicants that are generated even in this present life. I teach not a doctrine for the extirpating of intoxicants in the future life only, but one for subduing them now and also for extirpating them in the after-life.[155]

By 'thus subduing the mental intoxicant,' he added, one were to be led to 'unworldliness, to passionlessness, to cessation, to peace, to higher knowledge, to enlightenment, to *nibbana*.'[156]

Thus, at a period of history when there was no objective possibility of understanding the causes of human sufferings nor any scope to suggest the real remedy, the Buddha turned to the only possible solution, namely subduing the mental intoxicants. If this was not possible in the world at large, it was certainly possible within the *samghas*, the classless colonies founded by him.

The contemporaries of the Buddha failed, because they did not follow this path. In a sense, they were trying to achieve the impossible. They raised questions concerning 'the beginning and hereafter of things'. In short, instead of taking refuge in an *illusion* they were trying to understand the *reality*. This is the clue to their philosophies of frustration.

Of the contemporaries of the Buddha, we hear particularly of six philosophers: Purana Kassapa, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccayana, Sanjaya Belatthiputta, Makhhali Gosala and Nigantha Nathaputta. The last was the name of Mahavira, the leader of the Jainas. We do not have the scope here to discuss Jainism. But we shall discuss Makkhali Gosala separately and in greater detail; his failure, in life and teachings, formed the most dramatic contrast to the success of the Buddha. We may review here briefly the other four contemporaries of the Buddha.

The *Samanna Phala Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* contained the longest and the most detailed account of their teachings, introduced in the course of a narrative. The Blessed One was once dwelling at Rajagaha in the mango-grove of Jivaka, the

154 *Ib.* iii. 129, 130.
155 *Ib.* iii. 121.
156 *Ib.* iii. 122, 123.

children's physician of King Ajatasattu. At that time, King Ajatasattu was seated, on a full moon day, on the upper terrace of his palace, surrounded by his ministers. The King asked them, 'Who is the recluse or Brahmana whom we may call upon tonight, who, when we call upon him, shall be able to satisfy our hearts?'[157] One after another six of his ministers came forward, each suggesting the name of one of the contemporaries of the Buddha.

Each is described in the same stock terms, a formula applied elsewhere to the six heretics in the Pali canon. The phrases have a certain importance since they at least indicate the celebrity and influence which the early Buddhist tradition attributed to the six teachers.[158]

Each was described as the 'head of an Order, of a following, the teacher of a school, well known and of repute as a sophist, revered by the people, a man of experience, who has long been a recluse, old and well stricken in years.'[159] But the king remained silent to all these suggestions. Jivaka was sitting quietly near the king and the king asked him, 'But you, friend Jivaka, why do you say nothing?' Jivaka then suggested the name of the Buddha: 'Let your Majesty pay a visit to him. It may well be that, on calling upon him, your heart, Sire, will find peace.' 'Then, friend Jivaka,' said the king, 'have the riding elephants made ready.' Jivaka got five hundred she-elephants made ready and also the state-elephant the king was wont to ride.

Then the king had five hundred of his women mounted on the she-elephants, one on each; and himself mounted the state-elephant; and he went forth, the attendants bearing torches, in royal pomp, from Rajagaha to Jivaka the physician's mango grove.[160]

On reaching the mango grove, the king saw the Buddha with his assembly of monks, 'seated in perfect silence, calm as a clear lake.' Then the king bowed to the Blessed One, and stretching forth his joined palms in salutation to the Order, begged the Buddha to be allowed to ask a question. 'Ask, O king,' said the Buddha, whatsoever you desire.' The king asked:

There are, Sir, a number of ordinary crafts: mahouts, horsemen, charioteers, archers, standard bearers, camp marshalls, camp followers, high military officers of royal birth, military scouts ... All these enjoy in this very world, the visible fruits of their craft.... Can you, Sir, declare to me any such immediate fruit, visible in this very world, of the life of a recluse?[161]

157 *Ib.* i. 66.
158 Basham HDA 11.
159 Rhys Davids DB i. 66.
160 *Ib.* i. 67.
161 *Ib.* i. 68-9.

The Buddha asked, 'Do you admit to us, O king, that you have put the same question to the other recluses or Brahmanas?' The king admitted to have done that and, being questioned by the Buddha, repeated the answers he already received from the six contemporary philosophers. The answers were peculiar because none of these was really a pointed one. Instead of explaining the benefits of the life of a recluse, all of them expounded only the fundamentals of their philosophy. As Ajatasattu himself commented:

Thus, Lord, did Purana Kassappa, when asked what was the immediate advantage in the life of a recluse, expounded his theory of non-action. Just, Lord, as if a man, when asked what a mango was, should explain what a bread fruit is, just so did Purana Kassapa, when asked what was the fruit, in this present state of being, of the life of a recluse, expounded his theory of non-action.[162]

This irrelevance was significant. The question was simple enough. The teachers must have understood it. Evidently, there was no real answer from their points of view: none of them could think of any real advantage in the life of a recluse. That this was actually so becomes clear when we analyse the philosophies they expounded. Ajatasattu summed these up as follows:

The philosophy of Purana Kassapa

To him who acts, O king, or causes another to act, to him who mutilates or causes another to mutilate, to him who punishes or causes another to punish, to him who causes grief or torment, to him who trembles or causes others to tremble, to him who kills a living creature, who takes what is not given, who breaks into houses, who commits dacoity, or robbery, or highway robbery, or adultery, or who speaks lies, to him thus acting there is no guilt. If with a discus with an edge sharp as a razor he should make all the living creatures on the earth one heap, one mass of flesh, there would be no guilt thence resulting, no increase of guilt would ensue. Were he to go along the south bank of the Ganges striking and slaying, mutilating and having men mutilated, oppressing and having men oppressed, there would be no guilt thence resutling, no increase of guilt would ensue. Were he to go along the north bank of the Ganges giving alms, and ordering gifts to be given, offering sacrifices or causing them to be offered, there would be no merit thence resulting, no increase of merit. In generosity, in self-mastery, in control of the senses, in speaking truth there is neither merit, nor increase of merit.[163]

The philosophy of Ajita Kesakambali

There is no such thing, O king, as alms or sacrifice or offering. There is neither fruit nor result of good or evil deeds. There is no

[162] *Ib*. i. 70. [163] *Ib*. i. 69-70.

such things as this world or the next. There is neither father nor mother, nor beings springing into life without them. There are in the world no recluses or Brahmanas who have reached the highest point, who walk perfectly, and who having understood and realised by themselves alone, both this world and the next, make their wisdom known to others.

A human being is built up of the four elements. When he dies the earthly in him returns and relapses to the earth, the fluid to the water, the heat to the fire, the wind to the air, and his faculties pass into space. The four bearers, on the bier as a fifth, take his dead body away; till they reach the burning-ground men utter forth eulogies, but there his bones are bleached, and his offerings end in ashes. It is a doctrine of fools, this talk of gifts. It is an empty lie, mere idle talk, when men say there is profit therein. Fools and wise alike, on the dissolution of the body, are cut off, annihilated, and after death they are not.[164]

The philosophy of Pakudha Kaccayana

The following seven things, O king, are neither made nor commanded to be made, neither created nor caused to be created, they are barren (so that nothing is produced out of them), steadfast as a mountain peak, as a pillar firmly fixed. They move not, neither do they vary they trench not one upon another, nor avail aught as to ease or pain or both. And what are the seven? The four elements —earth, water, fire and air—and ease, and pain, with life (*jiva*) as the seventh. So there is neither slayer or causer of slaying, hearer or speaker, knower or explainer. When one with a sharp sword cleaves a head in twain, no one thereby deprives any one of life, a sword has only penetrated into the interval between seven elementary substances.[165]

The philosophy of Sanjaya Belatthiputta

If you ask me whether there is another world—well, if I thought there were, I would say so. But I don't say so. And I don't think it is thus or thus. And I don't think it is otherwise. And I don't deny it. And I don't say there neither is, nor is not, another world. And if you ask me about the beings produced by chance; or whether there is any fruit, any result, of good or bad actions; or whether a man who has won the truth continues, or not, after death—to each or any of these questions do I give the same reply.[166]

This is how the views of the four contemporary philosophers of the Buddha were summed up in the *Samanna Phala Sutta*. It is nonetheless impossible to be certain either about the personalities or their exact philosophical views. Other Buddhist and Jaina texts give us conflicting information about both. We are indebted to Barua,[167] Malalasekera[168] and Basham[169] for collecting and analysing all these.

[164] *Ib.* i. 73-4.
[165] *Ib.* i. 74.
[166] *Ib.* i. 75.
[167] PBIP 277-332.
[168] DPPN i. 37-8; ii. 89-90; ii. 242-3; ii. 999-1000.
[169] HDA 10-26.

It is doubted whether we can at all call these philosophers the contemporaries of the Buddha. Some of the texts referred to them as belonging to an earlier period while others implied that they came much later than the Buddha.

According to the *Mahabodhi Jataka,*[170] the Buddha, in his previous births, refuted the views of Purana, Makkhali, Pakudha, Ajita and Nigantha, the five heretical councillors of King Brahmadatta of Banaras; the implication evidently is that they were much older than the Buddha himself. This appears to be further corroborated by the *Samyutta Nikaya,*[171] which reported King Pasenadi telling the Buddha that he was a young novice compared to Ajita. Again Barua,[172] by identifying Pakudha Kaccayana of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* with Kakudha Katyayana of the *Prasna Upanisad,* argued:

> We have reason even to doubt if King Ajatasattu could have the opportunity to meet the teachers, considering that he usurped the throne of Magadha only eight years before the Buddha's death. On the other hand, it is manifest from Udayi's statement that the memory of these teachers became a thing of the past even in the life time of the Buddha.

However, on the apparent merit of another text called the *Milinda Panha,* all these philosophers belonged to a much later date than that of the Buddha. The text recorded a dialogue supposed to have taken place between a Buddhist teacher and Menander (Milinda), the Greek King who from B.C. 125-95 ruled over the Indus territory, Gujarat and the valley of the Ganges.[173] In this text,[174] the six philosophers of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* were mentioned as contemporaries of King Milinda, which, if true, implied that the philosophers were much later than the Buddha.

However, our modern scholars are not inclined to take the evidence of the *Milinda Panha* very seriously. 'The interview of King Milinda alluded to in the *Milinda Panha,*' said Barua,[175] 'is evidently the outcome of a naive plagiarism on the part of a later Buddhist writer.' 'The whole account,' added Malalasekera,[176] 'is either a plagiarism of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* or else the teachers referred to only belonged to the same respective schools of thought.' It is difficult to take the second alternative suggested by Malalasekera seriously because it cannot be proved

170 *Jataka* v. 246.
171 i. 68.
172 PBIP 281.
173 ERE viii. 87.
174 Basham HDA 21.
175 PBIP 281.
176 DPPN ii. 80.

that all the schools represented by the six philosophers survived so many centuries after the Buddha. Thus the account in the *Milinda Panha* could only be a plagiarism of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* and as such cannot prove that these philosophers came much later than the Buddha himself.

If the text placing these philosophers at such a later date was untrustworthy, the other texts placing them at a much earlier period were no less so. First, there is no ground to choose one *Jataka* story as possessing greater historic authenticity than the canonical literatures. Secondly, the passage of the *Mahabodhi Jataka* describing the views of these philosophers 'are in part paraphrases of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* passages.'[177] Besides, the same tendency to represent the views of the contemporary philosophers of the Buddha by paraphrasing the passages of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* is found in the other Buddhist texts. Thus, in the *Sandaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, Ananda described the four antithesis to the higher life. Of these, the first was a word-for-word transcription of the philosophy of Ajita Kesakambali as represented by the *Samanna Phala Sutta*, the second was a repetition of Purana's doctrine, the third was practically the same as the doctrine of Makkhali Gosala and the fourth was a curious blend of the doctrines of Pakudha and Makkhali as described by the *Samanna Phala Sutta*.[178] Of course, the philosophers were not mentioned here by names; nevertheless, there seems to be no doubt that the author of the *Sandaka Sutta* wanted to look at the *Samanna Phala Sutta* as providing the standard descriptions of the contemporary philosophers of the Buddha, or perhaps, the authors of both the texts were drawing upon a common source. The same may be said about some other Buddhist texts.[179] Thus the general authenticity of the *Samanna Phala Sutta* in placing the six philosophers as contemporaries of the Buddha cannot be very easily questioned. Besides, the inclusion of Nigantha Nathaputta[180] (Mahavira) and Makkhali Gosala may be considered as the most decisive evidence of the authenticity of the text in this matter because, these two representatives of Jainism and Ajivikaism respectively, are historically known to have been actual contemporaries of the Buddha.

Even assuming that Purana, Ajita, Pakudha and Sanjaya were really the contemporaries of the Buddha, very little is actually known about their personal lives. According to

177 Basham HDA 18.
178 *Ib.* 18-9.
179 *Ib.* 20.
180 SBE xlv. intro. xx-xxi.

Buddhaghosa,[181] Purana Kassapa was a runaway slave. It was to his slavery that he owed the name Purana: he completed (*purana*) the century of slaves in the household that owned him. Later, he ran away from his masters and went about naked because his clothes were stolen by thieves. This brief information about the personal life of the philosopher is questioned by our modern scholars on the ground that Kassapa was a *gotra* name distinctive of the Brahmanas and as such Purana must have been the son of a Brahmana rather than a born-slave. As Barua[182] argued,

> Apparently this (Buddhaghosa's account) is not true, for, as his name shows, Kassapa was born in a Brahmana family. The true significance of the Pali epithet *purana* seems to be that Kassapa claimed to have attained perfect wisdom (*purana jnana*), or that his disciples believed that he was replete with perfect wisdom.

Such an argument is based on a lack of sociology supplemented by pure imagination. Kassapa was indeed an important *gotra* name among the Brahmanas; but the *gotra* name did not necessarily imply Brahmanical descent. Even among the Brahmanas, this *gotra* was a relic of the tortoise totem and among the backward peoples definitely outside the circle of the Brahmanas the same *gotra*, with a similar totemic origin, was not uncommon in the past as it is not so even today. Thus the *gotra* name Kassapa did not prove that Purana was a Brahmana, and therefore, could not have been a slave. Barua's alternative interpretation of the name Purana (from *purna jnana* – full knowledge), again, is fictitious. If we are to trust the Buddhist sources, we cannot say that the claim to omniscience was made by Purana alone; others made the same claim. Thus, it may seem rather peculiar that a general claim like this gave a specfiic name to only one philosopher of the age.

The other source of our knowledge of the personal life of Purana is the *Dhammapada Commentary*.[183] If Buddhaghosa's *Sumangala Vilasini* tells us of the degradation of slavery that Purana suffered in his early life, the story of the *Dhammapada Commentary* indicates his tragic end presumably because of his failure to stand up as *the* prophet of the age.

The Buddha was going to perform a twin-miracle under a mango-tree called the Gandamba. The contemporary prophets of the Buddha tried their best to prevent him from doing it.

[181] *Sumangala Vilasini* i. 142. [182] PBIP 277.
[183] Malalasekera DPPN ii. 243, cf. Basham HDA 84ff.

But they failed. And when the Buddha actually performed the miracle, these other prophets fled in discomfiture and shame. Among them was Purana Kassapa. In the course of his flight, he came across one of his own followers, a farmer, who was going to see Purana with a vessel of broth and a rope. Purana took the vessel and the rope, went to the bank of a river, tied the vessel round his own neck and drowned himself. He was afterwards reborn in Avici, one of the purgatories specially designed for those who committed very grievous crimes.

The legend may not be true in the form in which it is told. But we cannot reject it altogether either. It is conceivable that the story was fabricated around a core of historic truth. It is quite possible that the Buddhist author was presenting here the real account of Purana's suicide, though with a Buddhist bias and a fascination for the miraculous. And if the story of Purana's suicide was true, the cause assigned to it, namely his failure and frustration, was not necessarily false. Such a life of total maladjustment from beginning to end – of a slave who tried to escape slavery only to destroy himself by drowning – may throw some light on the credo attributed to him.

It was the credo of total moral collapse and consequent futility of all human endeavours. There was no distinction between the virtuous and the vicious, the saint and the sinner, the noble and the ignoble. Action was futile and human endeavour totally meaningless: liberalism, self-control, abstinence and honesty were as futile as slaying, maiming, torturing and causing others to be slain and tortured. The logical corollary of such a feeling of futility and frustration was *ahetu vada* or *akriya vada*, attributed to Purana in the Buddhist and Jaina texts,[184] – the doctrine that it was impossible to explain any phenomenon by a rational cause and that human efforts were ineffectual. Such a philosophy reflected a world that appeared to the philosopher to have lost rational justification for anything within it.

Practically nothing is known about the personal lives of Ajita, Pakudha and Sanjaya. Even Buddhaghosa did not help us much in this matter. He told us, for example, that Ajita got his name Kesakambali (lit., one who wears a blanket of human hair) because he wore blankets woven of human hair: it was the most miserable of all garments, being cold in cold weather and hot in hot, evil-smelling and uncouth.[185] Of Pakudha, the only

[184] Barua PBIP 278-9.

[185] *Sumangala Vilasini* i. 144.

information that Buddhaghosa gave us is that he suffered from many obsessional rituals with regard to the use of water: he avoided cold water, using only hot water and when he could not get it hot, he went without washing altogether; if he crossed a stream, which he thought was a sin, he would make expiation by constructing a mould of earth.[186] Of Sanjaya's personal life, Buddhaghosa told us nothing. Is Sanjaya the same person as Sanjaya the Paribbajaka (the original teacher of Sariputta and Moggallana) of whom Malalasekera[187] wrote?

> It is said that when those two disciples left Sanjaya to become pupils of the Buddha, they were joined by two hundred and fifty others. Sanjaya then fainted and hot blood issued from his mouth.

It might have been the story of the tragic end of another frustrated person. But we do not have the right to claim that Malalasekera was referring here to the same person.

Although we have no authentic account of the lives of Ajita, Pakudha and Sanjaya, we can form a fairly accurate picture of the deep sense of spiritual misery and frustration suffered by them from their respective personal credos.

Barua gave us the impression of being very eager to discover the parallels of early Greek philosophy in the views of Pakudha, Sanjaya and Ajita. Pakudha,[188] he said, 'cannot be denied his rightful claim to be singled out as the Empedocles of India.' Sanjaya, according to him, was the Pyrrho of the Buddhist India:

> In all these points the disciples of Sanjaya are at one with the disciples of Pyrrho, notably Timon. Sanjaya, like Pyrrho, raised scepticism to a scientific doctrine, and thus prepared the way for a critical method of investigation in philosophy.[189]

Similarly, Ajita's position in Indian philosophy was exactly the same as that of Epicurus in early Greek philosophy; like Epicurus he was greatly misunderstood by his contemporaries as well as posterity: 'As a matter of fact, both Ajita Kesakambali of India and Epicurus of Greece were good men at heart, lovers of simple living and high thinking.'[190]

There is no doubt that Barua had to distort the views of both the Indian and the Greek philosophers to suit his peculiar thesis. His comparisons, far from helping us to understand the real position of the contemporaries of the Buddha, lands us only in confusions and contradictions. We may skip over the details

186 *Ib*.
187 DPPN ii. 1000.
188 PBIP 283.
189 *Ib*. 327-8.
190 *Ib*. 290.

and concentrate on what appears to be the most serious limitation in Barua's treatment of these philosophers. He wanted to look upon Pakudha, Ajita, Sanjaya and others as individual philosophers in the Greek or modern sense. But how erroneous is this approach is evident from Basham's observations on this point:[191]

> There is no need to accept the view which, both implicitly and explicitly, is to be found in Dr. B. M. Barua's *Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy,* that these men were philosophers or theologians in a modern sense. Rather it seems probable that in the sixth century B.C. the mental life of India was in ferment, and was permeated by a mass of mutually contradictory theories about the universe and man's place therein, some verging on the bizarre in their fancifulness, others more capable of a logical justification.

What Basham has overlooked—but what becomes quite evident from the data he himself has collected—is that the Buddhist and the Jaina sources repeatedly indicated that as far as their credos were concerned these philosophers had but little or no individuality. A doctrine attributed to one in a certain reference was attributed to another in a different context and this was done so often that the cumulative effect is that of a conglomeration of certain amorphous world-views shared almost indiscriminately by the contemporaries of the Buddha and Mahavira. The mutual contradictions in these views, referred to by Basham, will not seem so serious, if we remember that this cluster of world-views as a whole was characterised by a deep sense of futility and moral collapse. The contemporaries of the Buddha were thus basically the philosophers of futility, though the metaphysical basis of this sense of futility was often vague, obscure and even bizarre. We may examine some examples.

Purana, as we have just seen, subscribed to *akriya vada,* the view of the futility of human endeavour. Both the Buddha and Mahavira attributed the same view to Pakudha Kaccayana. However, what Pakudha offered over and above the *akriya vada* of Purana was only an attempted metaphysical basis of it. This is evident from Barua's[192] own observations:

> The question may perhaps be asked, why is it that Mahavira and the Buddha considered Kaccayana's doctrine to be a doctrine of non-action (*akriya vada*)? With regard to this question, we cannot do better than examine the ethical bearing of his metaphysical speculation. If the elements of being be eternally existent and unchangeable by their very nature, if they mechanically unite and separate by Pleasure and Pain, inherent in each of them, if there be,

[191] HDA 12. [192] PBIP 286.

in other words, no volitional activity of consciousness, then where is the ground for the conception of or distinction between good and bad, between knowledge and ignorance, and so forth? From a literal interpretation of his expressions it at once follows that in reality there is no act of killing or hearing or knowing or instructing.

If this be true, then the views of Purana and Pakudha cannot be treated separately: the latter was only trying to supply a metaphysical basis for the moral paralysis of the former. However, Barua's own understanding of this metaphysical basis is not beyond question. Pakudha did not really speak of the elements mechanically uniting and separating by the inherent forces of Pleasure and Pain; such an interpretation only shows the author's anxiety to make an Empedocles of Pakudha. Pakudha's ground for denying any distinction between the good and the bad was different. Barua himself spoke of a literal interpretation of Pakudha's expressions. Assuming the expressions attributed to him by the *Samanna Phala Sutta* to be genuine, we have a different ground for this *akriya vada* of Pakudha. The actual word used by him was 'barren' (*vanjha* in Pali, same as *vandhya* in Sanskrit). Pakudha, thus, saw only barrenness in everything: earth, water, fire, air, joy, sorrow, life – all the seven categories that he admitted appeared to him to be simply barren, and in this sense, 'as firm as mountains, as stable as pillars.' If we are at all justified in speaking of any modern parallel of this, it is to be found in the poetry of the frustrated post-war world: 'Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit.' In any case, Pakudha himself did not leave us in the dark as to what he meant by this barrenness. It was a barrenness from the point of view of human enterprise, or more particularly, of moral enterprise. It was only a callous world – a world indifferent to good and evil, reckless to death and destruction – that was reflected in the metaphysical basis of Pakudha's *akriya vada*: nothing was productive of the good or the holy and in this sense everything was dry and sterile. It was a philosophy of 'the wasteland, the cactus land,' a philosophy of negativism and meaninglessness, frustration and futility.

At the same time there was a pronounced leaning towards the materialistic point of view in the world-outlook attributed by the *Samanna Phala Sutta* to Pakudha Kaccayana. He did not speak of God, soul and the other world – in fact nothing that could be called a spiritual principle. All the seven categories admitted by him were concretely material and this-wordly. This materialistic leaning was but a heritage of the primitive world-

outlook in the philosophy of Pakudha, a leaning much more pronounced in the philosophy of Ajita Kesakambali. It was this materialism of Ajita which led Barua[193] and Basham[194] to argue that he 'must have been the forerunner of the later Carvakas.' Whether this was historically true is a different question. What is beyond doubt, however, is the uncompromising materialism of Ajita's philosophy.

Practically, all the writers[195] on Ajita have emphasised this materialism. What they have not emphasised, however, is another feature of his world-outlook, by far the most important from the point of view of our argument. Like the other contemporaries of the Buddha and Mahavira, Ajita, too, was taking a desparately gloomy view of human existence. He was no less a philosopher of futility and moral collapse than Purana Kassapa and Pakudha Kaccayana. Perfection in wisdom and conduct, claimed by certain recluses and Brahmanas of his times, appeared to him to be only stupid self-deceptions. 'It is a doctrine of fools, this talk of gifts. It is an empty lie, mere idle talk, when men say there is profit therein.' For everything led to death, and beyond death there was nothing. Again, if modern parallels are at all permissible, what Ajita propounded was only a philosophy of the graveyard. Even in the fragmentary passage attributed to him by the *Samanna Phala Sutta,* Ajita was obsessed with the image of death.

If the philosophy attributed to Sanjaya in the *Samanna Phala Sutta* did not give any direct expression to this sense of futility, the whole thing might have been the same, though in the intellectual sphere. He would not make any statement whatsoever because it was as futile as any other. Intellectual conviction, in any form, was hollow and meaningless. It was thus a philosophy of total mental chaos — a typical product of the age.

To sum up: the views attributed by the *Samanna Phala Sutta* to Purana, Pakudha, Ajita and Sanjaya were expressions of a deep sense of frustration, though expressed in different ways and with differences in the metaphysical basis. It is doubtful how much importance can be attached to these differences themselves. The Buddhist and the Jaina texts attributed aspects of all these to the different philosophers almost indiscriminately. Basham[196] has already examined this question exhaustively and he has prepared an interesting list of how the different sources

[193] *Ib.* 288.
[194] HDA 17.
[195] Dasgupta HIP iii. 521.
[196] HDA 22-3.

attributed different shades of opinions to the same philosopher in different contexts and how, again, the same views were attributed to the different philosophers without any regard either for discernment or accuracy. Now granting that the different sources were drawing upon the same tradition, we have little justification in looking at the views of the different philosophers as distinct from each other: the total implication is rather that of a cluster of amorphous philosophies shared indiscriminately by these philosophers, the dominant tone of this cluster as a whole being a deep sense of frustration and human ineffectuality. We are going to argue that the clearest and by far the most coherent expression of this tendency was to be found in the life and teachings of Makkhali Gosala, another contemporary of the Buddha and the leader of the Ajivika sect.

11. The Philosophy of Fate

Thanks to the recent exhaustive researches of Basham we are now in possession of a connected account of the life and teachings of Makkhali Gosala. We shall broadly follow him in our discussion of Gosala's philosophy of *niyati* or fate.

Basham has argued that the views of at least Purana, Pakudha and Gosala cannot be treated separately for, in all probability, these might have originally formed part of a single body of doctrine:

> In certain other passages of the Pali canon the distribution of doctrines among the six teachers is significantly altered, in a way which strongly suggests that the credos ascribed in the *Samanna Phala Sutta* to Makkhali, Purana and Pakudha were aspects of a single body of teaching.[197]

This 'single body of teaching,' according to Basham, was the central credo of the Ajivikas, i.e., the followers of Makkhali Gosala. And what was their central credo? Basham[198] has pointed out that the fundamental 'slogan' of the Ajivikas was: *natthi purisakare* (lit., human effort is ineffectual).

If this was so, there could have been nothing positive or definite to exclude Ajita and Sanjaya from the company of Purana, Pakudha and Makkhali. For there was nothing in their doctrines that went against this slogan. Rather, as described in the *Samanna Phala Sutta,* Sanjaya's doctrine was precisely that of human ineffectuality in so far as any intellectual enterprise was concerned, and Ajita argued that the actions commonly con-

[197] *Ib.* 18. cf. 80ff. [198] *Ib.* 9.

sidered good were meaningless nonsense. Besides, as Basham[199] pointed out, the second part of the doctrine attributed in the *Samanna Phala Sutta* to Makkhali was also attributed to Ajita in the *Dulva,* the Tibetan Buddhist scripture, and the first part to Purana by other texts. Thus it might not have been impossible that the views of Ajita and Sanjaya, too, belonged to the same circle of ideas which Basham considered to be a 'single body of teaching,' of which the credos ascribed to Purana, Pakudha and Makkhali were but aspects.

Be that as it may. There is no doubt that among the contemporaries of the Buddha and Mahavira, Makkhali Gosala was by far the most important philosopher. Besides, the personal life of Makkhali was full of dramatic elements which might throw important light on his philosophy of *niyati.*

Two stories of the birth of Makkhali Gosala have come down to us. One of these was told in the Jaina text, *Bhagavati Sutra,* while the other in Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Samanna Phala Sutta.* There are important similarities between the two stories.

In the *Bhagavati Sutra,*[200] Mahavira was made to narrate the story of Makkhali's birth. His father, according to Mahavira, was a *mankha* named Mankhali. Nothing can be said with certainty as to the meaning of the word *mankha.* Hoernle thought that the word did not mean anything particular. Basham argued otherwise. 'Hemacandra, in his commentary on the *Abhidhana Cintamani,* equates it with *magadha,* a bard.' Makkhali's father could have been a roving bard, not at all uncommon in those days. That he was actually one, was suggested by the story of the *Bhagavati Sutra.* Makkhali's mother was called Bhadda. With Makkhali in her womb she, along with her husband, came to a place called Saravana (lit., a thicket of reeds). There dwelt a very wealthy person called Gobahula (lit., one possessing a large number of cows). Bhadda was left by her husband in the cowshed (*gosala*) of Gobahula as he went to find some place in the village to live in. But he could not find any such place. The couple continued to live in a corner of the cowshed and it was there that Bhadda gave birth to Makkhali. Being the son of a *mankha* called Mankhali, the child got his name Makkhali, and being born in the cowshed (*gosala*) he was also called Gosala.

[199] *Ib.* 22-3. [200] *Ib.* 35.

Buddhagosa[201] tacitly agreed with this story about Makkhali Gosala by implying that the name arose from the circumstance of being born in the cowshed. According to him, however, the name Makkhali came from another circumstance. Gosala was a slave who tried to run away from his slavery. One day he was walking with a pot of oil over a patch of muddy ground. His master shouted at him, 'Don't stumble, old fellow' —*tat ma khal iti*. But Gosala was careless and spilt the oil. Apprehending the master's fury he started running. The master gave chase and managed to get a hold on the slave's robe (*dasakanna*). Gosala left the robe behind and ran away naked. After that he became a naked mendicant. He acquired the name Makkhali from the last words of his master's caution: '*ma khal*.'

This explanation of how Gosala got the name Makkhali is hardly credible. But Basham wanted to reject the story outright:

> This story is a patent fiction constructed, probably by Buddhaghosa himself, to provide an etymology for the names of the Ajivika leader, to account for his nudity, and to pour scorn on his order by attributing to him a servile origin.[202]

However, in default of any decisive evidence to the contrary, such an outright rejection of the entire story can hardly be justified. The presumption rather is that because these are the only two stories that have come down to us on the birth of Makkhali Gosala, both the Buddhist and the Jaina texts contained important elements of truth, though these must have been grossly misrepresented by their authors because of their hostility to the Ajivikas. To deny this is to surrender all hopes of reconstructing the earlier part of the life-history of Gosala, for the Ajivika tradition itself preserved nothing about it. Thus it is quite conceivable that Gosala was actually born in a cowshed, that he was a slave who tried to run away from his slavery and that his father was one of the roving bards or *mankhas* of the days. Gosala himself became a roving bard, a profession which, according to the Jaina source,[203] he renounced later under the influence of Mahavira.

For the middle period of Gosala's life, again, we have to depend upon the Jaina sources, particularly the *Bhagavati Sutra*. But we cannot do so uncritically because the main purpose of

201 *Ib.* 37.
202 *Ib.*
203 *Ib.* 50.

these sources was to ridicule and belittle Gosala. However, these tales, disparaging though they may be, give us the important information that Gosala remained for many years a close associate of Mahavira and that he tried his very best to acquire ascetic powers. But he failed to gain any real sense of fulfilment in all these. He had to break away from Mahavira, leaving the master extremely bitter. The Jaina sources explained this by attributing all sorts of personal motives to Gosala. But the real reasons, as evidenced by the information preserved about the last days of Gosala, were different. Life, as he found it in his days, was too difficult to endure and even the remedy offered by asceticism and Mahavira's religious system failed to be a satisfactory palliative. The sensitive poet, the roving bard, had a complete nervous collapse and he died a delirious lunatic.

The Jaina sources had to, in their own interests, attribute this nervous breakdown to Gosala's repeated defeats and exposures in the hands of Mahavira. Nevertheless, it does not mean that these sources have nothing important to say of the last days of Gosala. As a matter of fact, the *Bhagavati Sutra*, in describing the last delirium of Gosala, retain for us a clue which is crucial. In the course of this delirium, Gosala proclaimed a list of 'eight finalities,'[204] the sixth and the seventh of which were: 'The last sprinkling scent-elephant' (*carime seyanae gandhahatti*) and 'The last battle with large stones' (*carime mahasilakantae sangame*).

Both these finalities have more significance than is apparent. Both referred to Ajatasattu's campaign against the Vajjians. This point has already been elaborately argued by Hoernle and Basham.[205]

The *Niravalika* told the story of a splendid rutting elephant that sprinkled water on the ladies of the Magadhan court while they were bathing. It was the 'scent-sprinkling elephant.' King Bimbisara made a gift of it, along with a priceless necklace, to his younger son Vehalla. Ajatasattu, on ascending the throne, demanded these treasures of Vehalla. Vehalla refused, but knowing the consequences of his refusal, he fled with the treasures to his maternal uncle Cedaga, the chief of the Licchavis, i.e., the most important tribe in the confederacy of the Vajjians. Ajatasattu attacked the Licchavis and a fierce battle broke out. This battle was referred to as *rahamusale*.

[204] *Ib.* 68ff. [205] *Ib.*

Another Jaina text said that two battles were fought, called *mahasilakante* (the battle with large stones) and *rahamusale.*

> These events seem certainly to be those which inspired the sixth and seventh of the finalities, the sprinkling scent-elephant and the battle with great stones.[206]

There can hardly be any doubt about this observation. What Hoernle and Basham have not asked, however, is: Why should Gosala have at all looked at this battle as a 'finality,' the last catastrophe? There seems only one answer. In the destruction of the Vajjians, Gosala saw the doom of everything. For the Vajjians were the last of the important free tribes surviving then. Their destruction meant to the roving bard the loss of the last hope of the primitive or tribal tradition he was pitiably trying to cling to. It was thus the great 'storm-cloud' that swept away all hopes for humanity, as Gosala understood them. It meant the end of the 'drink,' the 'song,' the 'dance,' the 'reverence' for the elders. We have here the clue to the 'finalities' in Gosala's delirium: (1) The last drink (*carime pane*); (2) The last song (*carime geye*); (3) The last dance (*carime natte*); (4) The last greeting (*carime anjalikamme*); and (5) The last great storm-cloud (*carime pakkhala-samvattae mahamehe*).

It needs to be remembered here that Gosala was greatly attached to the heritage of the tribal society, and as such songs and dances had more than ordinary significance for him. These were the two 'paths' or *maggas* in his creed.[207] It is rightly presumed that dance and song had very important ritual significance for him.[208] And Gosala, during his last delirium, was himself dancing and singing, in the home of the potter-woman Halahala. When he was in such a state, Ayampula, one of his earnest followers, approached him for the clarification of some obscure question. Gosala's only advice to him was: 'Play the *vina,* old fellow, play the *vina,* old fellow.'[209] What could after all a wandering bard advise his follower when the whole world he stood for was falling to pieces before his very eyes?

But Gosala was not merely a poet. He was also a prophet and a philosopher. He wanted to arrive at a world-view, i.e., wanted to understand the world he lived in. And in this, as the Buddha himself realised, consisted the fatal limitation of

206 *Ib.* 69.
207 *Ib.* 117.
208 *Ib.* 194.
209 *Ib.* 63.

Gosala. The meaning of the stupendous social transformations taking place during his age — the tribes withering away or ruthlessly annihilated by the colossal might of the rising state-powers —could not be really comprehended even by the greatest thinker of the age. So the Buddha realised that the task was not to raise questions concerning the cause of things but to bring in quietude to the troubled heart, not to face reality but to seek refuge in a suitable illusion. It is precisely this point that helps us to understand the success of the Buddha as well as the failure of Gosala. The Buddha devoted himself to build up the most coherent illusion of the age while Gosala wanted to transgress the historical limitation and face reality. He wanted to understand the most gigantic historic transformation of his age—the collapse of the tribal institutions and the rise of the new values ushered in by the state-power. And he failed. Everything appeared to him to have been determined by the most stupendous, the most colossal, the unseen and fathomless forces of we-know-not-what. It was the force of fate or destiny. This explains his philosophy of *niyati.*

> The fundamental principle of the Ajivika philosophy was Fate, usually called *niyati.* Buddhist and Jaina sources agree that Gosala was a rigid determinist, who exalted *niyati* to the status of the motive factor of the universe and the sole agent of all phenomenal change.... For him belief in free will was a vulgar error. The strong, the forceful, and the courageous, like the weakling, the idler, and the coward, were all completely subject to the one principle which determined all things. Just as a ball of thread when thrown will unwind to its full length, so fool and wise alike will take their course, and make an end of sorrow.[210]

[210] *Ib.* 224-5.

BOOK IV

Idealism

CHAPTER EIGHT

VARUNA AND MAYA

THE BIRTH OF THE IDEALISTIC OUTLOOK

The Vedantists, that is the later philosophers representing the most prominent school of Indian idealism, have always tried to justify their standpoints on the authority of certain more or less stray passages of the *Upanisads;* some of them even undertook to provide commentaries upon the entire *Upanisads,* though in ways that suited them best. It is largely due to these efforts that the lay readers are often led to think that the *Upanisads* are a body of homogeneous treatises expounding an idealistic outlook. This is plainly a fallacy. The idealist school attributes to the *Upanisads* far greater coherence than the texts actually convey. Furthermore, it ignores the considerable complexities in which these are really involved. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, historically speaking, the idealistic outlook first fully emerged in certain portions of these texts. The *Upanisads,* thus, did contain much of the potentialities for future speculations on idealist lines. From this point of view, the later idealists were justified in drawing upon the Upanisadic passages.

What is not usually discussed, however, is that it meant a struggle on two fronts, as it were, for the Upanisadic speculators to arrive at this idealistic outlook. First, it was a struggle against the materialistic views of those philosophers who were outside of, and in fact vigorously opposed to, the Vedic tradition. We have seen that this materialism had its ultimate source in the belief implicit in agricultural magic and which became explicit in Tantrism and took on a clear philosophical form in original Sankhya. The early idealists, logically enough, understood it as the doctrine of the *pradhana,* representing the position of their foremost philosophical opponents. Secondly, the development of the idealistic outlook also meant for these early philosophers

a kind of internal struggle. It was a struggle for emancipation from the instinctive proto-materialism of their own ancestral convictions, though this archaic proto-materialism, forming part as it did of the pastoral-patriarchal tradition, could not assume the same form as the doctrine of the *pradhana* or *prakriti*, the offshoot of the agricultural-matriarchal life-pattern. Yet, *as materialism,* the two were comparable. Thus, we have here one more example of the surprising similarity between some aspect of the non-Vedic tradition and the subsoil of the Vedic one.

In this chapter, we shall concern ourselves specially with the second of these two points. We are going to argue that in the history of Indian philosophical thought the idealistic outlook first emerged on the ruins of a primitive proto-materialism, which represented the general character of the consciousness of the people living in the primitive pre-class society and that this can be illustrated by a review of the Vedic literatures, in however brief and bare an outline.

I. Vedic Literatures

In certain sense, the Vedic literatures have a unique importance for the understanding of the fundamental question of all philosophers, namely the question of materialism versus idealism. Here we find the philosophical ideas not only in their pre-sophisticated and therefore easily recognisable forms but also in their making — in the very process of their birth and growth. For, the enormous mass of the literary-speculative records beginning with the earlier portions of the *Vedas* and ending in the *Upanisads* must have taken, even on the most conservative estimate, a very long period to grow. Yet they have a peculiar continuity of their own. At the end of this protracted process of development, i.e., in the passages containing the most advanced speculations of the *Upanisads,* we find a crystallisation of the idealistic outlook. Interestingly enough, the same passages also reveal a distinct effort at emancipation from a very archaic form of materialism, presumably representing the beliefs of the early Vedic seers, that is, of the ancestors — or at least of the predecessors — of the same Upanisadic philosophers who were evolving the idealistic outlook. In other passages of the *Upanisads* there persist even stronger relics of this archaic materialism. In short, the Vedic literatures retain for us the evidences of the successive

stages through which the idealistic outlook gradually gained its shape and substance, its form and content.

But these literatures are not mere records of the development of the thought-process. They also contain significant suggestions from which we may reconstruct some picture of the material conditions of the people whose thought-process they record. These material conditions were changing or developing and the decisive step in this development, as we are going to see, was the breakdown of the early life based on collective labour and the emergence, on its ruins, of new social relations distinctly based on class-division and class-antagonism along with a characteristic contempt for manual labour. Our argument, in short, is that these two features of the later Vedic literatures, — namely, the birth of the idealistic outlook and the breakdown of the early collective life, — were not unconnected. The clue to the former is to be found only in the latter. The implication would be that the archaic materialism, the relics of which can be traced even in certain strata of the Upanisadic speculations, represented the general form of the consciousness characteristic of the early Vedic people and that its materialistic character was determined by the life of collective labour which they originally lived.

Looking, as we propose to do, at the thoughts and ideas as but superstructures on the economic life, it is logical for us to begin our enquiry into the general character of the Vedic world-outlook with questions concerning the general pattern of the economic life of the Vedic people.

2. Modern Parallels

The *Nighantu* — the earliest of the glossaries of Vedic words, certainly older than 700 B.C.[1] — mentioned the word *go* as one of the synonyms for *prithivi*.[2] *Go* means the cow, *prithivi* the earth. This led Sayana to interpret the word *go*, as occurring in one of the later *riks* of the *Rig Veda*,[3] as earth. According to

[1] Winternitz HIL i. 69n. Here is an interesting evidence of its antiquity. As one of the *purana-namani* it mentioned the word *ahnaya* (iii. 27). But the word cannot be traced in the only surviving recension of the *Rig Veda*, leading Yaska to comment *nigamah anvesaniyah*. This suggests that the *Nighantu* is older than this recension of the *Rig Veda*.

[2] i. 1. [3] x. 31. 10.

the *Nighantu,* again, the word *aditih* has the synonyms of *go*[4] as well as *prithivi.*[5] Similarly, *ila* stood for *prithivi,*[6] *go,*[7] *vak*[8] (speech) and *anna*[9] (food).

These ambiguities tell their own story: the cow meant everything to the Vedic seers – speech, food and in fact the whole world. One of them even sang that the very Vedic gods were born of the cows (*gojatah*[10]). And the *Pancavimsa Brahmana*[11] suggested that the distance of the heaven from the earth could be measured by placing a thousand cows on top of one another.

Obviously enough, such ideas could occur only to a pastoral people to whom cows and cattle meant all they cared for. 'In the most extravagant expressions,' as Winternitz[12] summed up a basic characteristic of the *Rig Veda,* 'cows and bullocks are praised as the most precious possessions.' This naturally reminded him of some of the tribal peoples still surviving on the level of pastoral economy. So in the footnote he hastened to add: 'It is quite similar among the Dinkas and Kaffirs in Africa, *whose present form of economics must be fairly in agreement with that of the Vedic Aryans.*'

It is not easy to dismiss the authority of a scholar of Winternitz's reputation, just as it is not easy to exaggerate the significance of this observation. Therefore, with due regard to the changes brought in under the impact of colonial rule, we may undertake a study of these African tribes, in order to gain some idea of the material conditions under which the early Vedic people lived.

Such a study, if undertaken with sufficient seriousness, will at least restrain the process of mystery-mongering from which our ideas of the Vedic people and their literatures have so far suffered. It is true that these literatures, being archaic in many a respect, can only be partially understood by us.[13] But the reason why the texts are generally misunderstood is not merely this. It is rather that feeling of reverence and awe – fostered through centuries of very subtle propaganda – with which most look upon the *Vedas,* which is at the root of this mystery-mongering. It would not be far from the truth, if we were to state, that a mind conditioned to read in the *Vedas* only the exalted and

[4] ii. 11.
[5] i. 1.
[6] *Ib.*
[7] ii. 11.
[8] i. 11.
[9] ii. 7.
[10] *RV* vi. 50. 11.
[11] xvi. 8. 1; xxi. 1. 9.
[12] HIL i. 64-5.
[13] *Ib.* i. 69ff.

the sacred, cannot be expected to use his critical faculties to arrive at a rational view of the subject. Under these circumstances, it may have a sobering effect upon us if we remember that, in view of their stunted economic development, some of the backward tribes surviving today, still preserve certain general characteristics that are reminiscent of the early Vedic people.

The key to the life and thoughts of the Dinkas of Africa is their pastoral economy. It is because of this that 'the desire to acquire a neighbour's herds is the common cause of those inter-tribal raids which constitute Dinka warfare.'[14] It is precisely the same reason that gave the early Vedic people the word for 'war': 'the old word for "war" or "battle" is originally "desire for cattle" (*gavisti*).'[15] Similarly, as Monier-Williams[16] has shown, in the *Rig Veda*,[17] the root *gam*, 'to go', when preceded by *gosu*, 'among the cows', meant simply 'to set out for a battle.'

This influence of the economic life on the vocabulary of the people was not an exception. Here is another interesting example: both among the Dinkas and the Vedic people the word for 'clan' is also the word for 'the enclosure for cattle.'

> The Dinka tribes are divided into a number of exogamous clans which the Bor Dinka call *ut*, the Tain and Aliab *gol*, and the Shish *deb*. The meanings of these words cannot be discussed here, though it is significant that among the cattle-owing tribes these same terms are also used for the cattle kraals of their clans.[18]

This is strongly reminiscent of the Vedic use of the word *gotra*, which meant the exogamous clans in which the Vedic people were organised.[19] As occurring in the *Rig Veda* it also meant the cow-stall:[20] Indra opened the cow-stall (*gotra*) for the Angirasas;[21] Brihaspati, with the assistance of Indra, released the cows from the cow-stall (*gotra*) hidden behind the mountain;[22] Indra looted the cow-stall (*gotra*) of the aliens for the benefit of his own tribesmen;[23] and so on. According to the *Nighantu*,[24] again, the same word *gotra* also meant *prithivi* or the world. Evidently, the early Vedic people knew their clans by their cow-stalls, or their cow-stalls by their clans – and the cow-stalls, like the cows, meant the whole world for them.

Some of these references to the *gotra* in the *Rig Veda* were

14 ERE iv. 705.
15 Winternitz HIL i. 64.
16 SED 363.
17 ii. 25. 4; v. 45. 9; viii. 71. 5.
18 ERE iv. 705.
19 Macdonell & Keith VI i. 235.
20 Roth SPD *s. v.*
21 i. 51. 3; ii. 17. 1.
22 ii. 23. 18.
23 iii. 39. 4; iii. 43. 7.
24 i. 1.

also references to the looting of cow-stalls of the aliens under the leadership of Indra, the Vedic god who was regarded by the Vedic people as their war-chief, a comparison of whom to the supreme military despot under whom the Zulus[25] are united may not be farfetched. However, as we shall see, this military supremacy of Indra represented an advanced stage of the pastoral economy at which inter-tribal war formed part of their regular preoccupation. Roth, and following him Whitney, argued that the 'pre-eminence of Varuna as belonging to an older order of gods was in the course of the Rig Vedic period transferred to Indra.'[26] There is thus reason to think that before the Vedic people acquired such a predominently marauding career, there was the pre-eminence of Varuna among them. Interestingly, the Dinkas, who are yet to be organised under such a military despot,[27] have for their supreme deity one who bears close parallel to the Vedic Varuna:

> They worship a high god, Dengdit, lit., 'Great Rain', sometimes called Nyalich... The name Nyalich is the locative of a word meaning 'above', and literally translated, signifies 'in the above.' It is not used, however, except as a synonym for Dengdit.[28]

But the word *worship* here is hardly appropriate. This is evident from the hesitation expressed by the same author in his description of the same people:

> The Southern Dinka (to whom the following specially refers) do not appear to use set forms of prayer, but seen *to ask in ordinary simple sentences that their immediate want may be granted.* They also have a number of hymns which are sung when an ox is slaughtered to avert drought or sickness; but, as Mr. Shaw informed the writer, men sing them when doing light work, and lately during a severe thunderstorm every one joined in lustily to appease the elements.[29]

Thus the hymns of the Dinkas — the simple expressions of their everyday desires — are not prayers in the accepted sense. And if their hymns are not our prayers, no more are their deities gods. They have yet to cast off traces of their human origin and elevate themselves to the status of the fully divine. Among the Niel Dinkas, for example, Dengdit 'appears as a less remote being who at one time ruled his tribe in human guise.'[30]

This recalls to our minds the so-called gods of the Todas, the only pastoral tribe still surviving in India. We are indebted

[25] ERE iv. .704.
[26] Macdonell VM 65.
[27] ERE iv. 704.
[28] *Ib.* iv. 707.
[29] *Ib.* Italics added.
[30] *Ib.*

to Rivers for an exhaustive study of them. And yet Rivers himself felt the greatest difficulty in understanding the gods of the Todas: 'There was no department of Toda lore which gave me greater difficulty than the study of the beliefs about the gods.'[31] The reason was not simply the complexities and contradictions of legends associated in the Toda minds with their gods; it was rather that these were not at all gods in the modern sense of the word. This will be evident from the following observation of Rivers himself:

> The typical Toda god is a being who is distinctly anthropomorphic and is called a *teu*. In the legends he lives much the same kind of life as the mortal Toda, having his dairies and his buffaloes... The gods hold councils and consult with one another just as do the Todas, and they are believed to be swayed by the same motives and to think in the same way as the Todas themselves.[32]

If anthropomorphism means conceiving the divine in terms of the human, it would logically imply the pre-existence of the idea of the divine; as such, there is the risk of anachronism in the use of the word in the context of those backward peoples like the Todas who have not yet reached the concept of the divine in its true sense. We shall see more of this while discussing Rivers' view of the Toda worship. For the present we may quote some more of his general observations on the Toda gods, as these have interesting light to throw on the gods of the early Vedic people.

> Before the Todas were created, the gods lived on the Nilgiri Hills alone, and then it is believed that there followed a period during which gods and men inhabited the hills together. The gods ruled the men, ordained how they should live and originated the various customs of the people. The Todas can now give no definite account of their beliefs about the transition from this state of things to that which now exists... Each clan of the Todas has a deity specially connected with it. This deity is called the *nodrodchi* of the clan, and is believed to have been the ruler of the clan when gods and men lived together.[33]

What is fascinating here is the gross human nature of the so-called gods of the Todas and the nature of their relationship with the members of the tribe which, again, is plainly human. It is here that we notice a surprising similarity of the Vedic gods with that of the Todas, although the Todas—members of a decaying tribe encircled and subordinated by peoples vastly superior to them — could create nothing like the rich and enor-

31 Rivers T 183
32 *Ib.* 182.
33 *Ib.* 183.

mously vast poetry of the Vedic people in the period of their expansion and expeditions. Here are some examples from the *Rig Veda*:

3. The Vedic Gods

Indra is invoked simply as 'man': 'I invoke Indra, the man (*naram*), who fulfils the desires of many from his ancient dwellings, — in the same manner as my ancestors did in the past.'[34] Agni is said to be *nrivatsakha sabhavan* — a friend of the most human type and a member of the tribal assembly.[35] Indra and Agni knew the ancient sages Kanva, Atri, Manu, 'who were skilled and who had abode among the gods.'[36] The ancient seers sat in joyful company with the *devah* and with true spells (*mantras*) generated *Usas*.[37] Indra is praised as the chief among men (*nritamah*) and one who shares out wealth (*vibhakta*) along with other human beings (*nribhih sakaih*).[38] We shall return later to discuss the extremely interesting implication of the word *vibhakta* or apportioner. For the present, the incomplete dehumanisation of the Vedic gods.

Agni is addressed as the chief human being among the human beings (*nrinam nritamah*),[39] the chief among men (*nrinam nripate*),[40] the best of men (*nritamah*).[41] He is invoked to produce (*brihat kridhi*), like the human being (*nrivat*), food in large quantity among human beings (*nrinam*).[42] Like the human being, says another *rik* addressed to him, give us wealth and cattle to our sons and grandsons.[43] Mitra and Varuna are invoked to come and join the *soma*-drinking in the company of human beings.[44] 'May Indra and Visnu, like human beings, give us house.'[45] Asvins, along with Agastya, are said to be the foremost among the leading men.[46]

The epithet of being the chief man among men is, however, most frequently used in the case of Indra. He is the finest man among all human beings (*nrinam nritamam*).[47] Along with

[34] i. 30. 9.
[35] iv. 2. 5.
[36] i. 139. 9.
[37] vii. 76. 4.
[38] iv. 17. 11.
[39] i. 77. 4.
[40] ii. 1. 1.
[41] v. 4. 6; iii. 1. 12; iv. 5. 2.
[42] v. 18. 5.
[43] vi. 1. 12.
[44] i. 137. 3.
[45] iv. 55. 4.
[46] i. 180. 8.
[47] iii. 51. 4; cf. iv. 16. 4; vii. 19. 10.

other humans he wins battles,[48] and, in their company, he eats good food.[49] The *yajamanas* (performers of the ritual) are asked to offer cakes to Indra, who is immediately present and is the bravest of the human beings (*nrinam viratamaya*).[50] As foremost among men (*nrinam nritama*) he cuts the enemies to pieces in battles.[51] 'We shall prepare *soma* for Indra, who is the leader of all work beneficial for the human beings and who is the best man among men (*nare naryaya nritamaya nrinam*).'[52] He is the strongest leader among men (*savistham nrinam naram*).[53] In the past, he was the chief among men (*pura cit sura nrinam*).[54] As the chief of men, he rends asunder the clouds and causes showers.[55] As the chief of the human beings, again, he has similar dwelling as of other human beings (*manusanam sam okah nritamah*).[56] He even speaks like human beings (*nrivat vadan*) and 'comes to us and gives us food.'[57] Like a human being he entered the army of the opponent.[58] Shouting like a human being (*nrivat nonuvanta*), he made the wind blow.[59] Like a human being, again, he increased the strength.[60] 'Indra, who are like a human being, from thee do we – along with the leaders of men – desire wealth.'[61] In the matter of food-procuring, Indra is the chief among men: the *rik* in which this occurs runs as a refrain in the third book of the *Rig Veda*, being the last *rik* of no less than twelve *suktas*[62] and it reoccurs twice in the tenth book.[63] Presumably, the Vedic poets attached great significance to this. In another *rik*, Indra is said to be not only the chief among the human beings (*nrinam nritamah*) but also as 'common' among (equal to?) them (*naryah*[64]). With all these evidences, it is safe to presume that Indra was originally only the culture-hero of some Vedic tribe, eventually raised to the status of a deity.

This conclusion will be strongly challenged by our orthodox scholars. But to them we may answer that we have in the writings of no less an orthodox commentator than Sayana himself, the rather startling admission that during the composition

[48] i. 178. 3.
[49] i. 178. 4.
[50] iii. 52. 8.
[51] iv. 33. 3.
[52] iv. 25. 4.
[53] viii. 40. 2.
[54] viii. 66. 5.
[55] iv. 22. 2.
[56] vi. 18. 7.
[57] x. 28. 12.
[58] iii. 34. 5.
[59] iv. 22. 4.
[60] vi. 19. 1.
[61] vi. 19. 10.
[62] 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 43, 48, 49, 50.
[63] x. 89. 18; x. 104. 11.
[64] x. 29. 1.

of the *Rig Veda,* actual human beings were really being raised to the status of Vedic deities. The evidence is as follows. In one *rik,*[65] Indra is addressed as the killer in great battles and the increaser of human skill *with the assistance of other human beings.* But the context in which this occurs suggests that Indra was doing all these things *with the assistance rather of the Maruts.* This naturally presented a problem to Sayana: How could the human beings of the *rik* mean the Maruts as well? And he answered, 'by the human beings' is meant 'by the men who, though originally men, later attained the status of the gods and were called the Maruts' (*nribhih manusyaih eva sadbhih pascat devatvam apannaih marudbhih*).

This explanation is provocative and the temptation to digress a little cannot be helped. If Sayana was here true to the Vedic tradition, then the attainment of godhead on the part of the Maruts may be looked upon as part of the living memory of the Rig Vedic poets. And if this be true, it should be possible for us to infer the original human characteristics of the Maruts by examining the characteristics attributed to them in the *Rig Veda* though as gods. The special significance of this lies in the circumstance that of all the Vedic deities the Maruts alone retained the strongest marks of the primitive group-life. They were most frequently referred to as living in *gana* or the tribal collectivity.[66] They were all brothers among themselves and strict equality was believed to exist among them.[67] They grew up together[68], were born at the same place,[69] and had the same abode.[70] They were strictly of one strength, one friendship and one birth.[71]

Thus the Maruts had this special importance in the *Rig Veda* that they retained the relics of not only a distinct history of human origin but also of the communistic or pre-class society to which, as human beings, they must have originally belonged. It is no wonder, therefore, that, like our Chanting Dogs of the *Chandogya Upanisad,* they were described in the *Rig Veda* as singing the collective labour-songs. They were repeatedly re-

[65] i. 129. 2. It is significant that the Maruts were later remembered as the deities of the folk—Keith VBYS intro. cv. They were called the sons of the soil (*prisni-matarah*)—Sayana on *RV* i. 85. 2.

[66] i. 14. 3; i. 38. 15; i. 64. 9; i. 64. 12; iii. 35. 9; v. 52. 13; v. 52. 14; v. 53. 10; etc.

[67] i. 165. 1; v. 59. 6; v. 60. 5; etc.

[68] v. 56. 5; vii. 58. 1.

[69] v. 53. 1.

[70] i. 165. 1; vii. 56. 1.

[71] viii. 20. 1; viii. 20. 21.

ferred to as singers.[72] That these were really labour-songs is evident from the following: While singing they built a house in heaven and generated the strength of Indra.[73] When Indra killed the dragon, they sang a song for him and pressed *soma*.[74]

But let us return to the human origin of the Vedic deities. Sayana[75] said that the Ribhus too, originally human beings, were eventually raised to the status of gods. This genealogy of the Ribhus is not indeed an invention of Sayana. For, in the *Rig Veda*[76] itself we come across the startling declaration that the Ribhus, being yet mortal, attained immortality (*martasah santah amritatvam anasuh*). Sayana[77] said practically the same thing about the Vahnis — *purvam manusyatvena maranayogyah api amritatva-labhena pranan dharitavantah*: though previously, being human beings, they were mortal yet they later became immortal. Of course, as deities they were only minor in importance. But the Asvins were not so. And the *Rig Veda* itself distinctly referred to the Asvins being raised to the status of the gods (*devah bhavatha*).[78]

Significantly enough, even after attaining the godhead, the Ribhus retained very clear relics of the collective life. As Sayana[79] pointed out, in the *Rig Veda* the Ribhus were addressed in the singular (*janmane*) because they formed a collective body (*samgha*). And the Asvins themselves maintained equality and comradely relationship with the human beings:

> O Asvins, our friendship with you comes down from our fathers; in friendship you are equal with us; know your and our grandfather to be the same (*yuvoh hi nah sakhya pitryani samanah bandhuh uta tasya vittam*: the interpretation of *banduh* is after Sayana.[80])

What needs to be noted is that the Vedic poets felt this essentially friendly and human relationship also for their other important deities. Here are a few, though not very carefully chosen, examples:

Indra was a friend indeed! He was a friend with friends; the friend and benefactor and protector.[81] He was a friend coming from the heaven and honouring 'us' as his friends;[82] a

[72] i. 166. 7; v. 57. 8; v. 59. 8; vii. 35. 9.
[73] i. 85. 2.
[74] v. 29. 2; v. 30. 6. See Mecdonell VM 80.
[75] On *RV* i. 20. 1.
[76] i. 110. 4.
[77] On *RV* i. 20. 8.
[78] iii. 54. 17.
[79] On *RV* i. 20. 1.
[80] vii. 72. 2.
[81] i. 63. 4; i. 100. 4.
[82] iii. 31. 8.

friend accompanied by faithful friends;[83] listening as a friend the praises of his friends.[84] The friends of Indra poured out *soma* for him.[85]

These citations are, however, too few to give us any real idea of how persistently Indra – described as 'the most human of the gods . . . whom the seers most closely fashioned in their own likeness'[86] – was addressed or invoked as a friend. For such references in the *Rig Veda* are really numerous and it would be tedious to quote them all. Nevertheless, we may mention here one more *rik* because, over and above expressing the intensely friendly relation felt by the Vedic poets for Indra, it has, in distinctly referring to the past, some additional interest for us. 'O Indra, the giver of horses, cows, barley, wealth, as you were our wish-yielder in the past, so are you our friend and speak to us who are your friends.'[87]

Agni was like a father, friendship with whom was the best of friendships (*sakha sakhye varenyah*[88]), a friend of all peoples (*jananam jamih*) and the most praiseworthy friend among all friends (*sakha sakhibhyah idyah*[89]). He was friend and minister and well disposed towards friends.[90] The seers, desiring protection, called themselves his friends.[91] 'Be favourably disposed, O Agni, on approaching us; the fulfiller like a friend or the parents; since men (enemies) are the grievous oppressors of men, do thou consume the foes who come against us.'[92] And so on. Indeed, the references to such extremely friendly relation to Agni in the *Rig Veda* are no less numerous than those to Indra.

The Visvadevas (all-gods) were addressed as comrades.[93] This comradeship, coming down from the days of the fathers, was felt to be immensely old.[94] Similar must have been the relationship felt by the Vedic poets for Asvins: it was desired that the ancient comradeship with them be revived and the friendship be sealed with drinks, being delighted together on the basis of equality (*punah puranam sakhyam krinvanah sakhya madhva madema saha nu samanah*[95]). Again, Soma,[96] Brahmanas-

[83] iii. 39. 5.
[84] iii. 43. 4.
[85] iii. 30. 1.
[86] Keith RPV 433.
[87] i. 53. 2.
[88] i. 26. 3.
[89] i. 75. 4.
[90] iii. 14. 1.
[91] iii. 9. 1.
[92] iii. 18. 1.
[93] iii. 29. 4.
[94] iii. 54. 9.
[95] iii. 58. 6.
[96] i. 91. 8; i. 91. 15; i. 91. 17.

pati,[97] Savitri,[98] Varuna,[99] Mitra,[100] Aryaman[101] and others were all maintaining warm and comradely relations with the Vedic poets and their kinsmen. However, as comrades, Varuna, Mitra and Aryaman were the foremost. Observed Macdonell[102];

> Aryaman though mentioned about hundred times in the *Rig Veda* is so destitute of individual characteristics, that in the *Naighantuka* he is passed over in the list of gods. Except in two passages, he is always mentioned with other deities, in the great majority of cases with Mitra and Varuna. In less than a dozen passages the word has only the appellative senses of 'comrade' and 'groomsman,' which are occasionally also connected with the god. Thus Agni is once addressed with the words: 'Thou art *aryaman* when (the wooer) of maiden.' The derivative adjective *aryamya*, 'relating to a comrade', once occurs as a parallel to *mitrya*, 'relating to a friend.' Thus the conception of Aryaman seems to have differed but little from that of the greater Aditya Mitra, 'the friend.' The name goes back to the Indo-Iranian period, as it occurs in the *Avesta*.

Similarly, Varuna, observed Macdonell, was 'on a footing of friendship with his worshipper.'[103] How far the word 'worshipper' correctly describes the relation of the Vedic poets and their kinsmen to the Vedic gods needs really to be studied. For the present, however, we may examine an important indication — a clear and distinct reference to a past — involved in this comradely reference to Varuna:

> What has become of our friendship with you, which was, in the ancient days, without any spite? May we foster it and enter your thousand-door abode, — you who are full of food.[104]

This reference to the past has some special significance with regard to the specific history of Varuna. It has also some general significance in the *Rig Veda*, which we may take up here.

The point is that 'some hundreds of years must have been needed for all the hymns found in the *Rig Veda* to come into being.'[105] There is no basis to think that during these hundreds of years the life and thought of the Vedic people remained unchanged. Therefore, it is only natural that the *Rig Veda* should contain different strata of the thought of the Vedic people passing through different stages of development. We have already before us theories concerning the different strata of the *Rig Veda* as worked out by the foremost of the modern scholars. However, such theories, being based mostly on bare philo-

97 ii. 24. 1.
98 i. 22. 8.
99 i. 41. 7.
100 *Ib.*
101 *Ib.*
102 VM 45.
103 *Ib.* 27.
104 vii. 88. 5.
105 Macdonell HSL 45.

logical considerations, are liable to suffer from the limitation of a formal approach and may mislead us to expect a view of the earlier condition of the Vedic people only in the hymns actually composed earlier. On the other hand, the possibility remains that a hymn, even when considered later on linguistic grounds, may, nevertheless, by invoking the memory of the past, reveal something about the Vedic people during their comparatively early stage of development. It is such a reference to the past that we often come across in the mention of the comradely relations of the Vedic poets with their gods, particularly Varuna. From these we may infer that the more we penetrate into the pre-history of the Vedic people, the clearer do we see their gods to be outspokenly human and maintaining a comradely relationship with the members of the tribe.

Philological considerations, too, corroborate this. Here is a *rik* of immense significance:

'O Agni, O Asura, this ritual (*yajna*) of ours is full of cows, of sheep (*aviman*), of horses, of food, of offspring; may thou be always without anger being in our assembly (*sabhavan*), a friend, like a human being (*nrivat-sakha*), possessing huge wealth and vast waters.[106]

Agni being addressed as an *asura* is indeed remarkable;[107] Sayana found it too inconvenient to comment upon. It indicates that the *rik* dates back to a period when to the poets of the *Rig Veda* the word *asura* had not fallen into disrepute. Probably, more significant than this is the use of the word *aviman*, 'one full of sheep.' This is the solitary use of the word in the whole of the *Rig Veda*,[108] the only reference to the sheep as a form of wealth. This again indicates that the *rik* dates back to a period when the Vedic seers were still raising and tending the sheep, a practice they must have eventaully given up. These, therefore, are evidences of the *rik* belonging to the most archaic stratum of the *Rig Veda*. And it is the only *rik* in which the word *nrivat-sakha*, 'friend-like-a-human-being,' occurs; in the comparatively earlier periods, the comradely relation felt by the Vedic poets for their gods was indeed overtly human.

Speaking of comradely relations, we are remined here of a

[106] iv. 2. 5.

[107] Cf. viii. 90. 6, where Indra is addressed as an *asura*. Such references to the Vedic Gods as *asuras* are usually taken as indicative of the Indo-Iranian period, became in the *Avesta* this work did not fall into disrepute.

[108] The word *avibhih* occurs four times but in the sense of a strainer probably made of the sheep's wool.

rather interesting evidence of the Vedic literatures. In the *Rig Veda*, one of the words used for 'comrade' is *jamih*: Agni was addressed as *jananam jamih*,[109] the comrade of all men. Sayana, on the authority of the *Unadi Sutra* explained the word as follows: '*jamu adane*,' *jamanti saha ekasmin patre adanti iti jamayah, bandhavah*; 'The root *jam* means to eat'; 'those who eat together from the same plate are friends, *jamayah*.' One point is clear: the word for comrade (*jamih*) is derived from the circumstance of having eaten from the same plate. The association of the word comrade with communism is indeed very old. But more of this later.

Let us return to the modern parallels of the Vedic gods. According to the belief of the African Dinkas, it was Dengdit who originally separated the heaven from the earth.[110] The Vedic people attributed precisely the same myth to their Varuna. It was because of Varuna's law and might that the heaven remained eternally separated from the earth.[111] Varuna palced the heaven and the earth in their respective positions.[112] Varuna held the heaven and the earth separately.[113]

The point, however, is that this myth is not distinctive only of the Dinkas or the Vedic people. It formed part of a world-wide belief, the relics of which are found in ancient China, Mesopotemia and Egypt and which survives among the Polynesians.[114] What, then, could be the source of such a widespread myth? Thomson[115] answered the question on the basis of an analysis of the Amerindian cosmogony: it is to be traced to the memory of the tribe originally separating into two inter-marrying moieties. The circumstance, therefore, that this extremely primitive myth formed part of the living faith of the Vedic poets goes to show that they could not have moved very much ahead of the truly primitive conditions.

The word primitive may perhaps be resented to as disparaging. Nevertheless, it is here that we have the clue to the real nature of the Vedic gods. When the primitive peoples use the word god they have in mind a being of a certain sort while when we use the same word we have in mind a being of a very different sort;[116] after all words change much more slowly than the meanings attached to them. The gods of the primitive

109 i. 75. 4.
110 ERE iv. 707.
111 vi. 70. 1.
112 vii. 86. 1.
113 viii. 41. 4.
114 Thomson SAGS ii. 90.
115 *Ib.* ii. 52, 91.
116 Frazer GB 92ff.

peoples are not the same as our gods. And if the gods are not the same, the hyms and prayers addressed to them, too, must be different in spirit. This again is a crucial point for the understanding of the Vedic hymns. However, before we pass on to discuss them, it may be of advantage to remember some more modern parallels. We may return to our Todas.

4. The Todas

Rivers discussed the 'prayers' of the Todas, although he was not quite sure whether it was the right word to use:

> I have treated these formulae of the dairy as prayers, and I think there can be very little doubt that they are of the nature of supplications, and are believed to invoke the aid of the gods in protecting the sacred buffaloes. It must be confessed, however, that there is no actual evidence in the formulae of direct invocation of the gods. The name of no god is mentioned in the vocative form. In some prayers there is barely mention of a god at all, if the term 'god' be limited to the anthropomorphic beings of the hill-tops.
>
> The exact relation between the formula and the gods largely depends on the exact meaning of the word *idith*, which is not quite clear. But, whatever the meaning of this word, it is evident that it is used in exactly the same way in the case of a god as in the case of a buffalo, a place, a dairy vessel, or other even meaner object.[117]

An examination of the so-called prayers of the Todas shows why Rivers was not sure about using the term 'prayers'. Here is the typical list of the short formulae with English translations carefully prepared by him:[118]

1. *tanenma* ; May it be well, or, may be blessed.
2. *tarmama* : May it be well, or, may be merciful.
3. *ir kark tanenma* : With the buffaloes and calves, may it be well.
4. *nuv ark ma* : May there be no disease.
5. *kazun ark ma* : May there be no destroyer.
6. *nudre ark ma* : May there be no poisonous animals.
7. *kavel ark ma* : May there be no wild beasts.
8. *per kart pa ma* : May be kept from (falling down) steep hills.
9. *pustht kart pa ma* : May be kept from floods.
10. *tut ark ma* : May there be no fire.
11. *ma un ma* : May rain fall.
12. *maj eu ma* : May clouds rise.
13. *pul puv ma* : May grass flourish.
14. *nir ur ma* : May water spring.

The interest of this list for the Vedic student is obvious.

[117] T. 229. [118] *Ib.* 215.

Translated into the archaic language of the *Vedas*, each *mantra* of the list could very easily have formed part of some *rik* of the *Rig Veda*. And all these are but the simple expressions of the everyday desires of a people who are yet to consider anything as more precious than cattle. It follows that if the buffaloes and everything connected with the dairy appear to them to be most sacred – the highest objects of reverence – the reason is not that they have learnt to take a religious view of these things in our sense, but simply that they mean everything to them. Their rituals are designed to multiply and protect the cattle by magic; the instruments of such protection are imagined by them to be invested with the most wonderful magical potency. It is only to be expected, therefore, that if we try to discover religion in our sense among the Todas, our search would be frustrated, or would end, as it has actually ended with Rivers, in characterising the pre-religious attitude of the Todas as a form of degenerated religion.

Rivers put forth the theory of degeneration of religion among the Todas on the basis of the conjecture – admitted by him as such – that the Todas must have originally moved to the Nilgiri Hills from some other part of the country with a 'body of highly developed gods,' who were gradually forgotten by their present descendants:

> Just as the prayer of the Todas seems to have almost degenerated into the utterance of barren formulae, so is there reason to believe that the attitude of worship which is undoubtedly present in the Toda mind is becoming transferred from the gods themselves to the material objects used in the service of the gods. *I acknowledge that I am here on less sure ground* than in the case of the dairy formulae, but the *general impression* left on my mind by the study of the beliefs and sacred institutions of the Todas is that the religious attitude of worship is being transferred from the gods themselves to the objects round which centres the ritual of the dairy. If I am right in *these surmises,* we find the Todas to possess a religion in process of degeneration. I do not suppose that this degeneration has been in progress only during the short time that the Todas have been exposed to the injurious contact of the outer world. The study of the Toda religion makes it seem to me most probable that the Todas came to the Nilgiri Hills with a religion of a higher order than they possess at present, with a developed system of gods who were believed to direct and govern the affairs of men, and that by a long and slow process these gods have become unreal, the supplications of the people for their guidance and assistance have become mechanical, and worship has been transferred from the gods, not to stocks and stones, but to bells and dairy vessels.[119]

[119] *Ib.* 453-4. Italics added.

This is not even a hypothesis but, as Rivers himself was conscientious enough to admit, simply a 'general impression,' a 'surmise,' which rested on no secure ground. Rather, the only basis for this general impression is the supposition that the Toda ancestors once possessed a developed religion with a developed body of gods with which they migrated to the Nilgiri Hills. Under these circumstances, the only way in which Rivers could strengthen his supposition was to add another supposition: the older gods of the Todas must have been replaced by a set of newer gods. Interestingly enough, these so-called new gods, of whom alone Rivers had any direct evidence, were all found to have been but human in origin:

> I am *inclined to believe* ... that these old gods have gradually through long ages lost their reality; that certain heroes have been raised to the ranks of the gods and that the lives of these heroes, founded to some extent on actual fact, have more interest to the Todas and are remembered and passed on while the legends of the older gods are gradually becoming vaguer in the progress towards complete obliviscence.[120]

Obviously, we have here the speculator replacing the field anthropologist – Rivers depending more on his 'inclination to believe' than recording what is actually observed. In default of any actual evidence for the original developed form of religion of the Todas, the bare fact that the ideas and practices of these people, as actually observed, fall short of a religion proper, cannot make the hypothesis of the degeneration of religion valid or legitimate. And if this hypothesis is illegitimate, the only other hypothesis that remains is, that the Toda beliefs represent a pre-religious stage of consciousness in which the gods have not fully cast off the traces of their mundane origin.

We have argued this point about the Todas because it has a direct bearing on our understanding of the Vedic literatures, which contain the records of a similar process of religion in the making. This does not mean that the Vedic literatures as a whole uniformly represent a similar stage of pre-religious consciousness. In a large number of places of the *Rig Veda* itself, we find the deities as fully developed gods and mentioned in the vocative form. What should not be overlooked, however, is that in many other hymns they are not so, and have yet to outgrow the marks of their human origin and quasi-human characteristics. What is still more important is that, so far as the earlier portions

[120] *Ib.* 452. Cf. 205-7 for the Toda myth of how Kwoto, the man, became Meilitars, the supreme among the gods.

of the *Rig Veda* are concerned, there is hardly any trace of the dawn of the other-worldly or strictly spiritual values in the consciousness of the poets who composed them. If it is at all possible to characterise anything as constituting the central theme of such a vast collection of songs, it is the desire for the essentially this-worldly objects on the part of a pastoral people.

5. This-worldly Desires

The Dinkas of Africa have their orally composed hymns. So are the 'prayers' or 'formulae' of the Todas handed down through generations. The reason is simple. Pastoral peoples are pre-literates. They are yet to develop a script.

Of course, the simple hymns of the Dinkas or the naive formulae of the Todas stand absolutely no comparison to the enormous and magnificent literary creations of the Vedic people. Nevertheless, there are certain points of similarity and these have great interest for us. Living as they did in a pastoral society, the Vedic poets, too, were unacquainted with a written script. The songs or poems they created were composed orally and handed down from generation to generation orally (*sruti*). The poet Kanva, son of Ghora, addressed the Maruts thus:

> Make hymns by your mouth (*asye*); spread these like the cloud; sing the *ukthya* (laudatory hymn) in Gayatri metre.[121]

'Making hymns by the mouth' is understandable enough. But what may be meant by 'spreading these like the cloud'? Sayana gave us the clue: 'As the cloud spreads water, like that.' In short, like the cloud, the hymns, too, were meant to shower. And, while discussing the Chanting Dogs of the *Chandogya Upanisad*, we have already seen what precisely were the Vedic songs meant to shower. It was the fulfilment of desires. That is why, the Vedic songs were also called *kamavarsi*, the showerers of desire. And what was the nature of these desires? The desire for food, wealth, cattle, children, strength and safety. It was never the desire for liberation or *moksa*. This word, signifying the highest ideal for the later champions of the *Vedas*, was in fact unknown to the Vedic poets.

To begin with, we may quote here only a few *riks* from the *Rig Veda*. The translation is somewhat free, but the this-worldly character of the underlying desires cannot be missed:

[121] i. 38. 14.

May the highly desired wealth move around us every day. May the foods inspire us in our work.[122]

O Agni, bestow abundant food upon us. O Agni, grant us colossal wealth.[123]

May we, O Brahmanaspati, be daily in possession of well-regulated and food-supplying wealth; do thou add for us the braves (sons) to the braves, — thou, who are the greatest, accept our invocations with food.[124]

The etymology of the name Brahmanaspati, as suggested by Sayana,[125] is quite revealing: *brahmanah annasya parivridhasya karmanah va patih palayita,* one that nourishes the activity of food-production. This was not an invention of Sayana. The *Nighantu*[126] already suggested that the word *brahma* was one of the synonyms for *anna* or food. This alone lays bare the materialistic conception of the Vedic gods; it also shows how far removed from the *Vedas* was the idealistic outlook of the *Upanisads,* in which *brahman* meant the ultimate reality as pure consciousness.

Incidentally, according to the *Nighantu,* another synonym for *anna* or food is *pitu.* But Pitu was also the name of a Vedic deity, to whom was addressed an entire *sukta* of the *Rig Veda.*[127] The special interest of this *sukta* is its stark materialism:

I glorify Pitu, the great, the upholder, the strong, by whose invigorating power Trita (the famous) tortured the deformed Vritra.

Savoury Pitu; honeyed Pitu; we welcome (*varimahe*) you; become our protector.

Come to us, beneficial Pitu, with beneficial aids; a source of delight; a friend well respected, and having no envy.

Your flavours Pitu, are diffused through the regions, as the dusts are spread through the regions, — as the winds are spread through the sky.

Those (men), Pitu, who are your distributors, most sweet Pitu, — they who are the eaters of you and your juices, increase like thou with elongating necks.

The minds of the mighty gods are fixed, Pitu, upon you: by your active assistance, (Indra) slew Ahi.

O Pitu, the wealth which is associated with the mountains, went to you; hear you, O sweet one, be accessible to our eating.

And since we enjoy the abundance of the waters and the plants; therefore, Body, do thou grow fat.

And since we enjoy, Soma, thy mixture with boiled milk or boiled barley, therefore, Body, do thou grow fat.

O corn of the name Karambha! fatten and activise the organ (*vrikkh*); therefore Body, do thou grow fast.

We extract from you, Pitu, by our words, as cows yield butter for oblation; — you who sit together and eat merrily with the gods, do sit with us and eat merrily.

122 iv. 8. 7.
123 iii. 1. 22.
124 ii. 24. 15.
125 On ii. 23. 1.
126 ii. 7.
127 i. 187.

Thus Pitu or food — a Vedic god who sat in the company of gods and men — was also wholesome to eat and one that *made the body fat.* Here there is no concept of the soul. The underlying idea was obviously far from being religious or spiritualistic. We shall quote some more examples from the *Rig Veda* to see how deeply obsessed these poets were with material desires. The following translations are from R. Ghosh who, depending on the interpretations of Sayana, has read spiritualistic ideas in the *riks* as far as practicable. Nevertheless, the predominantly this-worldly character of the songs are obvious:

Agni, son of strength, lord of food and of cattle, give us abundant sustenance, thou who knewest all that exists.[128]

May auspicious works, unmolested, unimpeded, and subversive (of foes), come to us from every quarter; may the gods, turning not away from us, but granting us protection, day by day, be ever with us for our advancement.[129]

Usas, possessor of food, bring us that various wealth by which we may sustain sons and grandsons.[130]

When, Asvins, you harness your bounty-shedding chariot, refresh our strength with trickling honey, bestow (abundant) food upon our people; may we acquire riches in the strife of heroes.[131]

May we manifest vigour among other men, Agni, through the steed and the food; and may our unsurpassed wealth shine like the sun over (that of) the five classes of beings.[132]

Let no enemy prevail against us, whether of god or man; protect us from both such foes.[133]

Sarasvati, best of mothers, best of rivers, best of goddesses, we are, as it were, of no repute; grant us mother distinction.[134]

Come to us with friendly, auspicious, and mighty airs, thou who art great and all-pervading: bestow upon us ample riches, safe from injury, well spoken of, desirable, and renowned.[135]

We solicit wealth of the adorable (Agni), the invoker of the gods, the pure, the single-minded, the unificent, the commendable, the beholder of all, who is many-coloured like a chariot, elegant in form, and always friendly to mankind.[136]

We thy mortal friends have recourse for our protection to thee, the divine, the grandson of the waters, the auspicious, the resplendent, the accessible, the sinless.[137]

May we, exempt from disease, rejoicing in food, roaming free over the wide of the earth, diligent in the worship of Aditya (*adityasya vratam upksiyantah*: lit., living near the *vrata* or the rituals of Aditya), ever be in the good favour of Mitra.[138]

Friendly and beautiful (Agni), bring thy friend (Varuna) to our presence, as two strong horses convey the swift chariot along the road to its goal: thou receivest, Agni, the gratifying (oblation) together with Varuna, and with the all-illumining Maruts; grant bril-

128 i. 79. 4.
129 i. 89. 1.
130 i. 92. 13.
131 i. 157. 2.
132 ii. 2. 10.
133 ii. 7. 2.
134 ii. 41. 16.
135 iii. 1. 19.
136 iii. 2. 15.
137 iii. 9. 1.
138 iii. 59. 3.

liant Agni, happiness to our sons and grandsons; grant beautiful Agni, happiness to ourselves.[139]

May riches, envied by many, devolve upon us day by day, and food await us.[140]

May Indra and Varuna, the overthrowers (of foes), be around us with (their) protections; (that thereby we may have) good sons and grandsons, and fertile lands, and long life and verility.[141]

Agni of irresistible prowess, bring to us most powerful treasure; (invest us) with surrounding wealth, mark out the paths to abundance.[142]

Mighty Agni, grant us a son able to encounter hosts; for thou art true and wonderful, and the giver of food with cattle.[143]

May we ever, gods, enjoy great and uninterrupted felicity. May we ever be participants of the unprecedented joy-conferring, and well-guided protection of the Asvins; brings to us, immortal (Asvins), riches, male progeny, and all good things.[144]

Bestow quickly, Angni, upon us who are affluent, wondrous wealth, with abundant viands and protections, such as enrich other men with wealth, with food with male descendants.[145]

Surpassing all earthy things, may he bestow upon us riches, destroying his enemies by his greatness, unresisted, unassailed.[146]

Drink it as of old, and may it exhilarate thee: hear our prayer (*brahma*), and be exalted by our praises; make the sun visible, nourish us with food, destroy our enemies, rescue the cattle.[147]

Bhaga, chief leader of rites, Bhaga, faithful promiser of wealth, Bhaga, granting (our wishes), fructify this ceremony, enrich us with cattle and horses; may we Bhaga, the eminent with male descendants and followers.[148]

Protector of the dwelling, recognise us: be to us an excellent abode, the non-inflicter of disease: whatever, we ask of thee, be pleased to grant: be the bestower of happiness on our bipeds and quadrupeds.[149]

Come, Nasatyas, with your cattle-giving, horse-bestowing, wealth-yielding chariot; all praises gather round you, who are resplendent with admirable beauty of persons.[150]

Overcomers of (hostile) men, Indra and Agni, come with food upon us; let not the malevolent have power over us.[151]

Bring to us, Asvins, riches comprising cattle, male offspring, chariots, horses, food.[152]

Bring unto us riches by hundreds and by thousands, desired by many, sustaining all.[153]

Endowed with great wisdom preserve us for fame, for strength, for victory, for happiness, for prosperity.[154]

House-giver wise Agni, rescue our work from the unrighteous and the enemies.[155]

Give us abundant wealth; give abundant wealth to our children, to our dwelling, fulfil our desire to live.[156]

[139] iv. 1. 3.
[140] iv. 8. 7.
[141] iv. 41. 6.
[142] v. 10. 1.
[143] v. 23. 2.
[144] v. 42. 17-8.
[145] vi. 10. 5.
[146] vi. 16. 20.
[147] vi. 17. 3.
[148] vii. 41. 3.
[149] vii. 54. 1.
[150] vii. 72. 1.
[151] vii. 94. 7.
[152] viii. 5. 10.
[153] viii. 5. 15.
[154] viii. 9. 20.
[155] viii. 44. 30.
[156] viii. 68. 12.

O Soma, grant us strength and initiatives, destroy the enemies, act for our welfare.[157]

May the effused Soma grant us thousand-fold wealth and mighty strength.[158]

Soma, send down rains, let there be waves of water in the firmament, bring the store of inexhaustible food.[159]

These renderings of some of the Vedic *riks* may not give us a true picture of the obscurities and mythological complexities involved in the verses. Nevertheless they do give us some idea of the key theme of the *Rig Veda—the desire for this-worldly objects*. The examples are not at all carefully chosen but taken at random. It may be argued, even as samples the few *riks* that we have quoted are far too inadequate to give us a convincing picture of the *Rig Veda*, which it has been calculated, in the only recension in which it survives today, equals in bulk to the surviving poems of Homer.[160] We may, therefore, take recourse to another standard — repeatedly called the statistical standard by Macdonnel — to judge how fundamentally the poets were obsessed by the material desires. This standard consists in enumerating the number of times something occurs in the text.

The *Nighantu*[161] mentioned a considerable number of synonyms for the word *anna* or food. Following is a rough estimate of the number of times these words, along with their derivatives, are found to occur in the *Rig Veda*: *andhah* 119; *wajah* 518; *payah* 113; *prayah* 110; *sravah* 218; *priksah* 43; *pituh* 61; *vayah* 24; *sutah* 181; *sinam* 3; *avah* 229; *ksu* 14; *dhasih* 12; *ira* 7; *ila* 58; *isam* 253; *urk* 89; *rasah* 64; *svadha* 106; *arkah* 108; *ksadma* 2; *nema* 13; *sasam* 33; *namah* 111; *ayuh* 117; *sunrita* 48; *brahma* 232; *varcah* 17; *kilalam* 1; *ysah* 75; *annam* 53.

The total comes to over 3,000, about one third of the total number of *riks* of the *Rig Veda*. And these synonyms for food are almost always mentioned in the specific context of a desire for food. Yet such an enumeration by itself gives us little idea of how thoroughly the whole of the *Rig Veda* is permeated by the this-worldly desires. The *Nighantu* mentioned 101 synonyms for *udaka*[162] or water, 28 synonyms for *vala*[163] or strength, 9 synonyms for *go*[164] or cow, 28 synonyms for *dhana*[165] or

[157] ix. 4. 3.
[158] ix. 13. 5.
[159] ix. 49. 1.
[160] Macdonell HSL 41.
[161] ii. 7.
[162] i. 12.
[163] ii. 9.
[164] ii. 11.
[165] ii. 10.

material wealth, and 15 synonyms for *apatya*[166] or progeny. And, to mention only one striking example, the word *go*, along with its derivatives, occurs no less than a thousand times in the *Rig Veda* and as positively related to the desire for cattle. Thus, if we are prepared to go through a weary process of enumerating the total number of times all the words for water, strength, cow, progeny and material wealth occur in the *Rig Veda,* and always as indicating the longing for these, we shall reach a staggering figure, – and this even after making due allowance for the cross-references involved in the considerable number of ambiguities that are there. And still the list would exclude a large number of other words expressing material desires.

Thus the impression we have from the random samples is confirmed by what Macdonell called the statistical standard. The Vedic poets did not know of any song that was not a showerer of desire and they did not know of any desire that was not positively material. And if their desires were so thoroughly this-worldly, it would be wrong to attribute to them any other-worldly or spiritualistic world-outlook on the precarious evidence of extremely doubtful interpretation of a few fragments of such an enormous compilation of their songs.

It is tempting here to venture a comment. According to the orthodox or later Vedic tradition, there are four forms of human ideal. These are: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*. The materialists are invariably denounced because of their refusal to admit the first and the fourth of these. The stock condemnation of them is that they are *artha-kama-pradhanah,* i.e., those who admit only *artha* (material wealth) and *kama* (the sexual urge, or, in the broader sense, desire in general) as the *summum bonum.* Therefore, in order to judge how far the early Vedic poets themselves differed from the materialists condemned by the later champions of the *Vedas,* we have to determine the importance of the ideals of *dharma* and *moksa* in the *Rig Veda.* The classical definition of *dharma,* as given by Kanada,[167] is 'that from which results the prosperity in this world (*abhyudayah*) and final liberation (*nihsreyasah*).' *Moksa*, again, meant final liberation. It would be a rare feat indeed if a single *rik* of the genuinely earlier portions of the *Rig Veda* can be made to reveal the ideal of *moksa* or final liberation as inspiring the early

166 ii. 2.

167 *Sutra* i. 1. 2.

Vedic poets. And if this were so, it would be improper to attribute to them the ideal of *dharma* either, because, as we have just seen, the classical understanding of *dharma* is inclusive of the ideal of *moksa*. In short, still innocent of the ideals of *dharma* and *moksa*, the early poets of the *Rig Veda* appear to us as not differing very much from the materialists: if one thing is certain about them it is that they were most thoroughly inspired by the ideals of *artha* and *kama*, though they were yet obviously far from formulating these ideals into a philosophy.

It may be observed that this understanding of the *Rig Veda* is contradicted by the sheer fact of the existence of a host of Vedic gods mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. The basis of this objection is that we are readily inclined to associate the idea of religion — and therefore other-worldliness and spiritualism — with the bare mention of gods and goddesses. But we have already seen that the so-called gods of the *Rig Veda*, as evidenced by a considerable number of passages, were yet far from becoming really divine. Even if it is shown that in other passages they moved somewhat nearer the more developed conception of the godhead, the surmise would be that their near-divine status, as witnessed by these passages, presupposes an anterior stage of development at which they must have been the human and quasi-human beings of the other passages. Besides, these early poets were so much preoccupied by the desire for sheer material values that even their gods were largely conceived in terms of these.

The breasts of Sarasvati bear wealth (*ratnadha*) and are the knowers of wealth (*vasu-vit*).[168] The Ribhus are the foremost among the bearers of wealth (*ratna-dhatamah*).[169] And so is Agni.[170] Indra is the giver of food (*vajada*[171]) and Usas is one that gives birth to food[172] (*vaja-prasuta*). Interestingly, the same epithets were applied to human beings as well: Agni, the best man among men, makes those (people) the possessors of wealth (*maghavanah*), producers of food (*vaja-prasutah*) and the makers of food (*isayantah*[173]). Agni himself is the lord of wealth (*rayinam patih*) and the fosterer of food (*vajambharah*[174]): Sayana quoted Panini to show that this was one of

168 i. 164. 49.
169 i. 20. 1.
170 i. 1. 1.
171 iii. 36. 5.
172 i. 92. 8.
173 i. 77. 4.
174 i. 60. 5.

the Vedic names (*samjna*) for Agni. Agni makes food (*vaja-yate*[175]) and Indra is one whose friends are the producers of food (*sravayat-sakha*[176]). Indra is one with food (*vajavan*[177]) and Asvins the possessors of food (*vajavanta*[178]). Agni is the lord of wealth (*rayi-patih*) among wealth (*rayinam*[179]). Matarisvan goes to Agni who is like wealth (*rayim-iva*[180]). Indra is full of wealth *Aisavan*[181]). Agni is the increaser of food (*unna-vridhah*) and one who moves with food (*prati caranti annaih*[182]).

However, of all such epithets the ones that interest us most are those which were applied by the Vedic poets almost indiscriminately to their gods as well as their kinsmen. One of these is *arkin*, the possessor of food. The *gana* of the Maruts is addressed as the prossessor of food (*arkin*[183]); at the same time human beings are called *arkinah*.[184] Another such is *vaja-ratna* (lit., glowing with food). *Asvins*[185] are addressed as *vaja-ratna* and so are the Ribhus.[186] At the same time the poets sing, 'May we, possessed of wealth, glow with food (*vaja-ratnah*[187]).' Indra is asked to make 'our' knowledge (*dhiyah*, alternatively actions) glowing with food.[188] A third interesting example is *vajayan*. Even Sayana[189] was sometimes obliged to render it as 'while making or producing food.' Indra is addressed as the producer of food (*vajayantam*[190]). Soma is producing food (*vajayan*[191]). Along with the Ribhus, who are the possessors of food, Indra, while producing food (*vajayan*), is asked to go towards the *yajna*.[192] However, the most frequent mention of this is in connection with the human beings: 'While producing food (*vajayan iva*) praise Agni, the foremost of food (*yasasta-masya*[193]).' 'O Indra, we, while producing food (*vajayantah*), sprinkle thee with *soma*.'[194] 'While producing food in the *yajna*, we invoke Indra.'[195] Men (*narah*), while producing food (*vaja-yantah*), invoke Indra.[196] Agni is addressed as the lord of wealth (*vasu-pati*), with whose help 'May we, while producing food

175 iv. 7. 11.
176 viii. 46. 12.
177 iii. 60. 6.
178 viii. 35. 15.
179 i. 60. 4; i. 72. 1.
180 i. 60. 1.
181 i. 129. 6.
182 x. 1. 4.
183 i. 38. 15.
184 i. 7. 1; i. 10. 1.
185 iv. 43. 7.
186 iv. 34. 2; iv. 35. 5.
187 v. 49. 4.
188 vi. 35. 1.
189 On iii. 60. 7.
190 viii. 98. 12.
191 ix. 68. 4.
192 iii. 60. 7.
193 ii. 8. 1.
194 i. 30. 1.
195 i. 132. 1.
196 iv. 25. 8.

(*vajayantah*), win food (*vajam jayema*[197]).' 'We, while producing food (*vajayantah*), invoke Agni in battles for our protection — Agni, the increaser of wealth in battles.'[198] In a large number of cases, the invocation accompanying the act of the production of food is directed to Indra: 'Indra, we invoke thee while producing food.'[199] 'While producing food we are calling Indra and Vayu to give us food.'[200] The food-producing words are sent towards Indra.[201] Indra remains with the producer of food.[202] 'O Indra, protect us — the producers of food.'[203] But what is of most surprising interest is that there were poets even in the age of the *Rig Veda* who thought that the production of food was sufficiently important for the human beings and the invocation of Indra for this purpose was useless: 'O people (*janah*), while producing food you send praises to Indra, as if he truly exists! But who has ever seen Indra? Hence whom should we praise?'[204]

These examples, again, are not very carefully chosen but taken more or less at random. There is no doubt that any student of the *Rig Veda*, can, without much effort, find plenty of parallels. Deeply concerned as they were with material values, the poets of the *Rig Veda* hardly knew or praised any god who was not vitally connected with these values. And, lest we attribute too hastily a consciousness of spiritualistic ideas to the early Vedic poets, it may be useful to have a word of caution here. Words change more slowly than their meanings. And so it often happens that under new circumstances an old word is retained to describe a new phenomenon altogether. The common belief that the *Rig Veda* is spiritualistic in content is to a great extent the result of some such confusion: a considerable number of words, originally having only a materialistic content in the *Rig Veda*, have survived in later Sanskrit with altered, i.e., with spiritualistic, implications. In short, the meanings of these words had passed into their opposites.

The most handy example would probably be the word *bhagavan*. In our times it is used as the commonest word for God. However, *bhaga* in the *Rig Veda*, simply meant material wealth

197 v. 4. 1.
198 viii. 11. 9.
199 vi. 19. 4.
200 vii. 90. 7.; vii. 91. 7.
201 viii. 3. 15.
202 v. 31. 1.
203 v. 35. 7.
204 viii. 100. 3. The poet of this hymn was Nema of the Bhrigu clan. In the subsequent *riks* of the hymn, Indra appeared before Nema and dispelled his doubt and praised himself.

or a share thereof. *Bhagavan*, therefore, meant 'one with material wealth,' or 'one entitled to a share.'

The word *isvara* (God) is another example. The poets of the *Rig Veda* did not, however, took this to mean God. The *Nighantu*[205] mentioned four synonyms for it: *rastri, aryah, niyutvan* and *inaina*. All these referred to one connected with the function of 'spreading' — presumably, increasing or augmenting. But increasing or augmenting what? A reasoned view of the contexts in which the words actually occur in the *Rig Veda* does not leave us in any doubt as to the answer: it was the activity of increasing or augmenting the material wealth, particularly food. Thus Indra, as *arya*, was sending cattle to the Vedic singers and giving back the earthly meal to the givers thereof.[206] Agni, as *arya*, in the past led men to get profuse food.[207] As *arya*, again, he was producing wealth and upholding the *rita* and was nourishing the gods and men by giving them food.[208] Vayu, as *niyutvan*, was invoked to come with wealth for the delight of the singers.[209] Indra, as the lord of *ina*, was the giver of horses, cows, barley and had been in the past a wish-yielder as a friend towards friends.[210] Agni, as *inaina*, was the lord of wealth and the custodian of wealth.[211] And so on. It would be tedious to quote more examples. What needs to be remembered, rather, is that, if the gods of the *Rig Veda* thus invariably appear as connected with the activity of increasing the material wealth — particularly food — it may be inferred that they were originally only the producers thereof. Interestingly, the *Nighantu*[212] mentioned four synonyms for *aisvarya-karmanah*, the activities of making or producing material wealth or the means of subsistence; needless to add, all these referred to the activities of the gods themselves.

6. The Comparative Method

To recapitulate: That which invariably inspired the songs of the *Rig Veda* was only the simple everyday desire of a pastoral people. Even the gods, in whose praise the poets were so often going into ecstacies, were but the embodiments of such desires as already fulfilled. In other words, the same simple everyday

[205] ii. 22.
[206] i. 33. 3; i. 81. 6.
[207] i. 70. 1-2.
[208] i. 71. 3.
[209] 1. 135. 4.
[210] i. 53. 2.
[211] i. 149. 1.
[212] ii. 21.

desires went to the making of the Vedic gods. Invocations to them were often only friendly requests to lead the poets and their kinsmen to the fulfilment of these desires. We cannot judge such requests in terms of what we mean by worship. For the gods, in a large number of the songs, were only human or quasi-human beings; and if in some other songs they have ceased to be so, even these point to an anterior stage of their development at which they must have been so. That is, though some of the Vedic poets moved nearer to what we mean by religion, their ancestors did not. And it is this ancestral experience of theirs that concerns us most.

It will be objected that such an approach to the *Rig Veda* ignores or overlooks an important characteristic of these songs. These were not songs in the ordinary sense of the term, but were meant to be employed (*viniyoga*) in the Vedic rituals, the *yajnas*. And this means that in order to understand the original significance of the Vedic songs, we have to go into the question of the origin of the Vedic rituals.

Yajna or the ritual is, in a sense, the key to the Vedic literatures. However, before we go into the question of the origin of the *yajna*, it is necessary to be clear about the comparative method we discussed in Chapter II.

If the Vedic society cannot be understood independently of the Vedic *yajna*, the Vedic *yajna*, too, is un-understandable when divorced from the Vedic society. The key to the Vedic society is to be found in the pastoral economy of the Vedic people. In accordance with our method, therefore, we may begin with the question: What is known in general about the basic characteristics of the social organisation of the people living in the pastoral stages of economic development?

This takes us back to Chapter IV, Section 2, where we have discussed the classification of the surviving tribes from the point of view of their economic development. What is particularly relevant here is that, like the third grade of the agricultural economy, the second or the more advanced grade of the pastoral economy marks the termination of the pre-class or truly tribal society.: it is here that the tribal society begins to disintegrate. In other words, there were two parallel paths that led men from the pre-class society. These were the developments of the agricultural and the pastoral economy. However, the final qualitative change — the full transformation of the pre-class into the class-divided society — could only be the result of the accumu-

lated quantitative changes, the gradual increase in the productivity of human labour which ultimately enabled it to produce more than was necessary for its maintenance, i.e., created the possibility for a few to live on the labour of many, the essential precondition for the division of society into classes. We shall try to trace some aspect of this process as reflected in the Vedic literatures. For the present, we need only remember that the development of the pastoral economy was itself a protracted process at the end of which alone the final breakdown of the pre-class society took place.

The *Rig Veda* was composed by pastoral people, but it must have taken them several centuries to compose the whole of it. This long period must have also witnessed the accumulation of the quantitative changes in the productive capacity of the Vedic people which went on creating the material conditions for the ultimate qualitative transition from the pre-class to the class-divided society. Thus, on the basis of the general law of social development, the presumption would be that the *Rig Veda* as a whole was the literature of a long transitional period, retaining, on the one hand, the memory — and sometimes even the reflection — of the pre-class society along with its characteristic beliefs and customs, while, on the other hand, foreshadowing the realities of the class-divided society.

That the Vedic people were originally tribal is, however, not a new point. The foremost of the modern scholars have unhesitatingly used the word tribal to refer to their social organisation.[213] However, the special advantage of the comparative method is that it helps us to move a step forward — to a clearer understanding of the tribal society — and thereby to enable us to understand certain more or less obvious features of the *Rig Veda* in the light of our knowledge of the surviving tribes.

It may be of some interest to mention here at least one example of how even the most eminent of our modern Vedic scholars have, by ignoring the comparative method, arrived at conclusions which are at best superficial. Here is an observation of Winternitz:[214]

> However, we must not form too exalted an idea of the moral conditions in ancient India, and not picture these to ourselves in such an idyllic manner, as certainly Max Muller has at times done. We hear in the hymns of the *Rig Veda* of incest, seduction, conjugal unfaithfulness, the procuring of abortion, as also of deception, theft

[213] CHI i. 81ff.; VA 245ff. [214] HIL i. 67-8.

and robbery. All this, however, proves nothing against the antiquity of the *Rig Veda*. Modern ethnology knows nothing of the 'unspoiled children of nature' any more than it regards all primitive peoples as rough savages or cannibal monsters. The ethnologist knows that a step-ladder of endless gradations of the most widely differing cultural conditions leads from the primitive peoples to the half-civilised peoples, and right up to the civilised nations. We need not, therefore, imagine the people of the *Rig Veda* either as an innocent shepherd people, or as a horde of rough savages, nor, on the other hand, as a people of ultra-refined culture. The picture of culture which is unfolded in these songs ... shows us the Aryan Indians as an active, joyful and war-like people, of simple, and still partly savage habits. The Vedic singers implore the gods for help against the enemy, for victory in battle, for glory and rich booty; they pray for wealth, heaps of gold and countless herds of cattle, for rain for their fields, for the blessing of children, and long life. As yet we do not find in the songs of the *Rig Veda* that effeminate, ascetic and pessimistic trait of the Indian character with which we shall meet again and again in later Indian literature.

This is sound, but only negatively — as an antidote to the idyllic picture drawn by Max Muller and of course also to the mystical awe propagated during so many centuries. And this negative value of the observation is the result of the admission, — however halting and partial it might be,—of the comparative method, the admission that modern enthnology has significant light to throw on such ancient a literature as the *Rig Veda.* For the Vedic people could not have, like Athena of Greek mythology, sprung forth from the earth in complete armour as it were. On the contrary, like all other peoples of the world, they had to begin life at the very beginning, from the lowest step in the scale of social evolution, or as Winternitz said, they had gradually to climb the step-ladder leading from savagery to civilisation. Further, as rightly pointed out, there remained survivals of savage habits even in the *Rig Veda,* which, obviously enough, cannot be understood except in the light of what is known in general about such habits still surviving among the very backward peoples.

However, the conclusions which Winternitz has arrived at is quite insignificant and even positively misleading. And this is because of the want of sufficient seriousness about the comparative method itself. It is not the positive teaching of modern enthnology that the primitive people are as much given to 'incest, seduction, conjugal unfaithfulness, the procuring of abortion, deception, theft and robbery' as the civilised ones; that, in other words, in social vices the primitives vie with the civilised.

[215] OF 60ff.

The point, as Engels[215] clearly explained, is that it is impossible to judge the sexual morality of the primitive society in standards of our own; and though inter-tribal war, and therefore robbery, might have become a regular feature of the more developed stages of the pastoral economy, the material conditions for individual thefts within the tribe did not develop in the truly primitive society for the very simple reason that property was still jointly owned. If, therefore, it is possible to trace in the *Rig Veda* records of social vices in the modern sense, the passages in which these occur are to be traced to that stage of social development in which the truly primitive conditions were beginning to disintegrate. But the predominant characteristic of the *Rig Veda* does not reveal social vices as we understand them today.

We shall return later to discuss the concept of the *rita* in the *Rig Veda* and shall see that it represented what Engels[216] called 'the simple moral grandeur of the ancient gentile society.' But the most pronounced characteristic of the social organisation first.

We may, in accordance with our method, begin with what is directly observed about the tribes surviving today at a stage of development similar to that of the Vedic people. On the admission of Winternitz himself, the Kaffirs of Africa are such. And here is the observation of Kidd[217] on the most pronounced feature of their social organisation:

> A Kaffir feels that 'the frame that binds him in' extends to the clan. The sense of solidarity of the family in Europe is thin and feeble compared with the full-blooded sense of corporate union of the Kaffir clan. The claims of the clan entirely swamp the rights of the individual. The system of tribal land-tenure, which has worked so well in its smoothness that it *might satisfy the utmost dreams of the socialist,* is a standing proof of the sense of corporate union of the clan. Fortunately for Europeans this sense of corporate union does not extend beyond the tribe, or no white man could have survived in South Africa. In olden days a man did not have any feeling of personal injury when a chief made him work for white men and then told him to give all, or nearly all, of his wages to the chief; the money was kept within the clan, and what was the good of the clan was the good of the individual and vice versa. It should be pointed out that it is not only the missionary who teaches the native the value of the individual, but it is also the trader, the mine-owner and the farmer. The striking thing about this unity of the clan is that it was not a thought-out plan imposed from without by legislation on an unwilling people, but a felt-out plan which arose spontaneously along the line of least resistance. If, one member of the

216 *Ib.* 163.

217 SC 74ff.

clan suffered, all the members suffered, not in sentimental phraseology but in real fact. The corporate union was not a pretty religious fancy with which to please the mind, but was so truly felt that it formed an excellent basis from which the altruistic sentiments might start. Gross selfishness was curbed, the turbulent passions were restrained by an impulse which the man felt welling up within him, instinctive and unbidden.

If the modern Kaffirs are still on the same level of development which the Vedic people have passed through many thousand years ago, and if further a corporate union which can 'satisfy the utmost dreams of the socialist' be the key to the social organisation of the Kaffirs as observed, it may be quite logical for us to expect reflections or the relics of the same corporate union in the literatures of the Vedic people.

One striking feature of the *Rig Veda* is already evident from the passages we have referred to. The desire for the this-worldly objects, which directly or indirectly formed the core of the Vedic songs, had a *pronounced collective bias*. They were not, in other words, the desire of the individual for his personal prosperity, but pronouncedly and positively the desire of the group for its collective prosperity. To say this is not to claim that it is impossible to trace in the *Rig Veda* any passage in which was expressed the desire of the individual. There *are* such passages, evidently representing the disintegration of the primitive collective life of the Vedic people. However, our starting point is the collective consciousness in the *Rig Veda* which could be nothing but the reflection of the collective life of the Vedic people during their earlier career.

This sense of collectivity is so overwhelmingly evident in the *Rig Veda* that it is practically difficult to ignore it. Not to speak of food, cattle and the other forms of material wealth, even when children – or more specifically the male offsprings – were desired, they were desired for the group as a whole: for 'us' and not for 'me'.[218] Under these circumstances, it is surprising that even the eminent Vedic scholars remain silent about such a pronounced and obvious characteristic of the Vedic songs. The reason can only be what Marx called the *judicial blindness* of even the greatest scholars and, as we have seen, the comparative method can be a cure for it.

218 E.g. i. 73. 9; ii. 11. 21; etc. A large number of references may indeed be catalogued.

7. Relics of Collective Life

In Chapter III, Sections 7 and 12, while discussing the problem of the *gana* and the *vraata* in the Vedic literatures, we came across some aspect of the collective or the pre-class organisation of the Vedic people. There are many more interesting evidences of the same, or of its survival, in the *Rig Veda*. It may be convenient to discuss these under two heads: (1) evidences of general nature and (2) evidences more specific in character. Under the latter will come the questions of production, distribution and administration. Production should logically come first. However, in view of the considerable complexities in which the problem is involved, we propose to take it up only after discussing the problems of distribution and administration. For, what becomes clear about the Vedic people from their mode of distribution and administration may throw light on what is still obscure about their mode of production; i.e., if their mode of distribution and administration be clearly collective, the presumption would be that their mode or production, too, must have been so. But the evidences of more general nature first. The point to be remembered is that a sense of equality is only a counterpart of collectivity.

Here are two successive *riks*[219] of the *Rig Veda*:

> Those ancient poets (*kavayah purvyasah*), the observers of the *rita*, were in joyful company with the gods (*devanam sadha-madah asan*); those ancestors (*pitarah*) gained the secret lustre; with spells of truth they generated Usas.
>
> Being united (*adhi samgatasah*) with the common cattle (*samane urve*: according to Sayana, *sarvesam sadharane go-samuhe*), they became of one mind (*te sam janate*: Sayana — *te eka-buddhayah bhavanti*); they strive together as it were (*na yatante mithah te*) nor do they injure the rituals (*vratani*) of the gods: not injuring each other they move with wealths (*amardhantah vasubhih yadamanah*).

It is to be noted that we have here a reference to the very ancient phase of the life of the Vedic people, for the *riks* belong to the older stratum of the *Rig Veda* and there is, moreover, a distinct reference to the past in these. The special interest of these is, however, the fact that notwithstanding the obscurities of minor details, the broad picture of primitive communism along with its collective consciousness is clear enough. And this memory of primitive communism was also the memory of a period when men were enjoying the joyful company of the gods

219 vii. 76. 4-5.

and even the gods themselves, far from being the parasitical receivers of oblations of our later ideas, were performing their own rituals susceptible to human attacks or protections. Moreover, the simple moral grandeur of the Vedic people when they were living under such communistic conditions is not to be overlooked: the ancient poets were observing the *rita* and jealousy was unknown to them.

The ancient poets referred to by the *riks* were the Angirases. We may digress a little here to consider the myths about them in the *Rig Veda,* for these have significant suggestions as to the original relation between the Vedic poets and the Vedic deities. We are indebted to Macdonell[220] for compiling the myths.

Weber thought that the Angirases were priests of the Indo-Iranian period. Their close relation to the Atharvans seems to confirm this, though it is more likely that they were primitive magicians rather than priests in the later sense. In any case, there seems to be no doubt that they were originally nothing but human beings. The poets of the *Rig Veda* repeatedly referred to them as 'fathers,'[221] 'our fathers'[222] and 'our ancient fathers.'[223] In the enumeration of the ancestors was mentioned the 'ancient Angirases.'[224] They were also mentioned as fathers along with the Atharvans and the Bhrigus,[225] who were but human beings in origin. The *Anukramani*[226] attributed the composition of the ninth book of the *Rig Veda* to the different Angirases, indicating that the old tradition remembered them as ancient poets or, more properly, poet-magicians.

At the same time, from the other myths about them in the *Rig Veda* we can see how they gradually rose to the status of Vedic gods. By *yajna* they obtained immortality and friendship with Indra.[227] Accompanied by them, Indra pierced Vala[228] and produced the cows.[229] Inspired by their praises Indra did the same.[230] By leading them, Indra was called *angirastamah,* the chief of the Angirases.[231] 'Incidentally,' as Macdonell[232] added, 'Indra assumes a less prominent position than the Angirases in the myth of the cows. Thus the Angirases are said to have emptied the stall containing cows and horses, with Indra

220 VM 142-3.
221 x. 62. 2.
222 i. 71. 2.
223 i. 62. 2.
224 i. 139. 9.
225 x. 14. 6.
226 See Macdonell VM 143.
227 x. 62. 1.
228 ii. 11. 20.
229 vi. 17. 6.
230 ii. 15. 8; iv. 16. 8.
231 i. 100. 4; i. 130. 3.
232 VM 142-3.

as their companion (x. 62. 7). Here we have the transition when Indra's name ceases to be mentioned any more, his characteristic functions being directly attributed to the Angirases themselves. By the rite they drove out the cows and pierced Vala (x.62.2.), caused the sun to mount the sky, and spread out mother earth (x.62.3.). By the rite they cleft the rock and shouted with the cows (iv.3.11).' If the Angirases could thus usurp Indra of some of his most characteristic functions, the reason could only be that they became not merely the friends of Indra but, in certain respects at least, even equal to him. That is, the Angirases, originally only human beings, eventually became gods. It is only from this point of view that we can understand how Brihaspati, while piercing the rocks and capturing the cows,[233] or while giving cows like Bhaga,[234] could himself be called an *angirasa*. *Agni*, though in some place called the chief Angiras,[235] was often called an Angiras.[236] 'In one passage (i.31.17),' said Macdonell,[237] 'in which the poet exclaims, "O Agni, come to us as to Manus, as to Angiras, O Angiras," the name designates both the ancestor and Agni.' It is no wonder, therefore, that we should find *soma* offered to them[238] and they invoked as gods.[239]

We have seen the result of the same process with regard to the Maruts and the Ribhus. We have also noted that, even after their elevation to the status of the gods they retained strong relics of the collective life, which, as human beings, they were presumably living. It is not surprising, therefore, that we should find the same peculiarity about the Angirases also. One entire *sukta* of the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*[240] was devoted in their praise. In this we find the most frequent invocations to them as gods. One of the most prominent characteristic of the *sukta*, however, is that the Angirases were referred to throughout as a group, in their collectivity. Presumably, they were originally not only human beings but human beings living the collective life of the pre-class society. The two *riks* we started with confirm this: these ancient poets had common ownership of cows and enjoyed a collective consciousness.

This brings us back to the main point of our discussion, namely the relics of collectivity in the *Rig Veda*. It would be

233 vi. 73. 1; 3.
234 x. 68. 2.
235 i. 75. 2; i. 31. 1.
236 In i. 127. 2 Agni is the seniormost among the Angirases and in vi. 11. 3 he is the wisest among them.
237 VM 143.
238 ix. 62. 9.
239 iii. 53. 7.
240 x. 62.

remarkable if the references to collective ownership of material wealth were confined to these two *riks* only. However, the fact is that we come across similar references in other *riks*, too. Here is another example of collective ownership along with a significant reference to the past:

> As in the past (*purvavat*), he (Agni) generated the common wealth (*samanam dhanam*) for the living beings.[241]

In certain other examples, the reference to the past does not occur:

> Let the common cow (*samanam nama dhenu*) be moving swiftly.[242]
> We invoke Indra, the custodian of the common wealth (*samanam vasavanam*) and the giver of wealth (*vasu-juvam*) for protection.[243]
> O Indra, as a girl staying with father takes equal share (*bhaagam*), so bring and measure for us (*kridhi upa masi*) that wealth; give us share for our body (*tanvah*[244]) . . . .

The law of inheritance in the *rik* quoted last may be somewhat obscure; but its overtly materialistic outlook is not so, for, whatever was desired was for the sake of the body. In another interesting *rik*, common right to the cows seems to follow from the very concept of instinctive morality – the *rita* – of the early Vedic people:

> O Agni, your brilliance comes to us and you brought the cows of *rita* equally to us (*ritasya dhenah anayanta sasrutah*: Sayana interpreted *sasrutah* as *samanam gacchantyah*[245]).

The human beings, the assistance of whom the gods were frequently enjoying, were sometimes described as equal among themselves. 'Along with men, who are equal among themselves (*samanaih nribhih yat yuktah*), O Agni, you killed the demons.'[246] Men became equal to gods,[247] and this from the times of 'the fathers.'[248] Agni was equal to all.[249] Indra protected the cows, killed Vritra and was equal to all.[250] Some kind of equality among the gods thmeselves was also hinted at. Indra and Agni, like twin brothers, had the same parentage.[251] The Nasatyas sat in the assemblies and drank *soma* with the human beings.[252] The Asvins were equal in origin and in friendship.[253]

241 iii. 2. 12.
242 vi. 66. 1.
243 viii. 99. 8.
244 ii. 17. 7.
245 i. 141. 1.
246 i. 69. 8.
247 iii. 58. 6; vii. 72. 2.
248 vii. 72. 2.
249 i. 127. 8.
250 iv. 30. 22.
251 vi. 59. 2.
252 vii. 73. 2.
253 viii. 73. 12.

The Maruts were coming out from their common abode[254] and some of the gods were enjoying the common oblations offered to them.[255] It is not impossible even to find the gods as engaged in collective labour:

> O Ribhus, make food together for our *yajna*, for our work, for food accompanied with progeny—that we may live together along with all the heroes, the people: give us strength for our organs.[256]

However, of all the relics of collectivity in the *Rig Veda*, perhaps the most striking one is to be found in its last *sukta*, which, chronologically too, belonged to its latest stratum. The last three *riks* of this *sukta* represent the most intense longing for the equality and collectivity once enjoyed by the Vedic people and their gods, but which had evidently been lost to them.

> Do ye concur; be ye closely combined; let your minds be concurrent, as the gods of old sat concurrent about their portion (*devah bhaagam yatha purve samjananah upa-asate*).
>
> (Be) their counsel (*mantra*) the same, their gathering the same, their course (*vrata*) the same, their intent alike (*saha*); I offer for you with the same oblation; do ye enter together into the same thought (*cetas*).
>
> Be your design the same, your hearts the same, your mind the same, that it may be well for you together.[257]

The primitive collectivity of the Vedic life had to be broken and it was broken. But, as we shall presently see, it was broken by such forces as appeared to some of the more sensitive poets as a degradation, a fall. And they were moaning for the life that was lost, were trying frantically to revive the memory of the past, as if that would restore the bliss of equality and unity once enjoyed by their ancestors.

The crucial point is suggested by the words: *devah bhaagam yatha purve samjananah upa-asate* – just as in the past the gods, in their collectivity, used to accept their shares. Evidently, things had changed: Indra was already demanding a greater share in the booty.[258]

But what is meant here by 'share,' and what is meant by 'respective shares' of the gods? This leads us to the characterristic mode of distribution under primitive communism and its relics in the *Rig Veda*.

[254] v. 87. 4.
[255] i. 25. 6.
[256] i. 111. 2.
[257] x. 191. 2-4. Cf. *AV* vi. 64. (tr.) Whitney.
[258] vii. 32. 12.

8. Bhaga and Amsa : Distribution

Darwin[259] observed that perfect equality existed among the individuals comprising the Fuegian tribes and this, he feared, was fatal to any hope of their ever becoming civilised. For this equality was maintained by a peculiar mode of distribution which amounted to equal division of everything they possessed: 'Even a piece of cloth given to one is torn in shred and distributed, no one individual becomes richer than another.' Bailey[260] noted the same custom among the Veddhas of Ceylon.

We have here the clue not only to the practice of apportioning wealth frequently referred to in the *Rig Veda*, but also to the origin of the two otherwise peculiar Vedic deities, Bhaga and Amsa, both meaning 'share,' the economic function of both being comparable to that of Moira of the ancient matriarchal Greece. However, our method demands that we should begin with a more detailed study of what is known in general about the mode of distribution characteristic of the primitive pre-class society.

The lowest savages known to us have this universal characteristic, that the individual has no personal right to the game, fish, vegetable food or even a personal gift received by him. The equalitarian society in which he lives demands that the other individuals belonging to the group are instinctively entitled to a share of it. Here are some interesting observations.

Palmer, in his 'Notes on Some Australian Tribes,'[261] said:

> Division of game takes place according to well-established rule in which they practise considerable self-denial, the hunter often going short himself that others might have the recognised share. When a kangaroo is killed, the hind leg is given to the hunter's father, with the backbone; the other leg to his father's brother; the tail to his sister; the shoulder to his brother; the liver he eats himself. Sometimes his own kin will be left without any, but in that case it seems to be the rule that her brother gives her of his hunting, or someone else on her side. A blackfellow would rather go short himself and pretend he was not hungry than incur the odium of having been greedy in camp, or of neglecting the duties of hospitality.

Among the tribes of North-Central Australia, the same principle operates though with difference in details: 'the hunter himself takes only the inner parts and blood. He then waits till he receives a share from some of the other hunters who are

[259] NVRW 242. [260] Quoted by Briffault M. ii. 494.
[261] Quoted by Briffault M. ii. 493-4.

related to him.'[262] Briffault[263] has referred to the custom where even a single fish or snake is divided. And here is Ridley's[264] description of how the Australians divide among themselves the gifts received by them:

> So when blackfellows whose traditional ideas of law are not dispelled come to the stations and receive presents or rewards, these are divided among their companions; and it was not from mere thoughtlessness or ignorance of the value of what they possessed, nor yet from benevolence, that when a suit of clothes was given one, the company to which he belonged were seen accoutred, one with nothing but a coat, another with a hat, another with trousers. *A venerable law handed down from many generations imposed the division upon them.*

Briffault[265] has collected many more interesting examples of this 'venerable law' of division as operating among the primitive peoples. We may mention here a few.

> Among the Eskimo, the hunter has no personal right to his catch; it is divided among all the inhabitants of the village. 'In small things and in great, whatever is to be found in an Eskimo village in the way of provisions and tools is the common property of all. As long as there is a piece of meat in the camp it belongs to all.' The same division of the products of the chase takes place amongst the Aleuts. In the islands of the Ellice group it was almost a misfortune for a man to make a good catch of fish, for his canoe was surrounded the moment he landed, and everyone picked out the fish he liked best. In Tahiti, 'it seems,' says Bougainville, 'that as regards the necessaries of life there is no private property, and everything belongs to everybody'.... All food is distributed throughout the clan in New Caledonia.... Among the Kugamma of Nigeria a hunter's bag of game is divided among the whole village.

Thus the low level of technique makes production as well as consumption a collective affair.[266] Their systematic communism is rendered possible by the inviolable law operative among them, according to which every member of the clan is entitled to an equal share in the material wealth acquired by the clan as a whole or by any member thereof. Indeed, the consciousness of there being any difference between the wealth acquired by an individual in the clan and by the clan as a whole is yet to dawn upon the mind of these savages. As La Hontan remarked,[267]

[262] Quoted by Briffault M. ii. 494. He has given us many more references to the same practice. For other references to the law of division among the hunting peoples, see Thomson SAGS i. 297.

[263] M. ii. 494.

[264] AA. 7. Italics added.

[265] M. ii. 494ff.

[266] See Thomson SAGS i. 297 for many more references.

[267] Quoted by Briffault M. ii. 496-7.

These savages know nothing of mine and thine, for it may be said that what belongs to one belongs to another..... It is only those who are Christians and dwell at the gates of our towns who make use of money. The others will not touch it. They call it the 'Snake of the French'.... They think it strange that someone should have more goods than others, and that those who have more should be more esteemed than those who have less. They never quarrel and fight amongst themselves nor steal from one another, or speak ill one of another.

Added another French observer:

What is extremely surprising in men whose external appearance is wholly barbarous is to see them treat one another with a gentleness and consideration which one does not find among common people in the most civilised nations. This, doubtless, arises in part from the fact that the words 'mine' and 'thine', which St. Chrysostom says extinguish in our hearts the fire of charity and kindle that of greed, are unknown to these savages.[268]

It is to be noted that the same law of division operating with the same inviolable force among these people prevents the birth of the sense of 'mine' and 'thine' in their consciousness:

I have seen them divide game, venison, bear's meat, fish etc. among themselves, when they sometimes had many shares to make, and cannot recollect a single instance of their falling into a dispute or finding fault with the distribution as being unequal or otherwise objectionable.[269]

To sum up: The lowest savages known to us have no sense of private or individual property because 'a venerable law handed down from many generations imposed the division upon them.' Therefore, if the prehistory of the Vedic people, like the prehistory of all other peoples of the world, was marked by similar savagery, then it is only to be expected that their earliest literatures, — whatever might have been the stage of their economic development at which they were compiled, — inevitably full of reverence for the ancestral institutions, should retain the marks of the memory of the same inviolable law according to which every individual was by birth entitled to his share in the material wealth of the group.

The law of division, in its direct form, is found operative among the hunting tribes. The Vedic people, however, were much ahead of this stage of development. The predominant feature of their economy, as reflected in the *Rig Veda,* was pastoral. The adoption of this pastoral economy itself was a decisive step taken by the ancient peoples towards the accumu-

[268] *Ib*. ii. 497. [269] *Ib*.

lation of private property and, therefore, to the eventual breakdown of their primitive collective life.[270] We cannot, therefore, judge the customs of the *Rig Veda* by the standards of the hunting savages. During the age of the *Rig Veda* the people were far ahead of the simple hunting economy. It is also true, however, that their ancestors were not so. Therefore, in the lives of these ancestors the same law of division must have operated with the same inviolable force as it does in the life of the surviving hunting tribes. And those who composed the *Rig Veda* were often obsessed with the veneration for their ancestral institutions. The survival of the relics of this ancient law of division is thus not to be wondered at. Of course, its original implication could not be equally apparent in all these relics. The *Rig Veda* was after all a collection of pieces many of which were separated from each other by centuries.[271] Some of the poets were themselves nearer the ancient institutions than others and as such it is but natural that in certain passages the ancient custom should be referred to more directly than in others. The remoter the relic the less is its chance of preserving the original significance of the custom. When the later poets, themselves living under changed conditions, looked back they were wont to attribute to these ancestral institutions a significance that was to a large extent the product of their own altered conditions. However, while investigating into the prehistory of the Vedic people what primarily interests us is not the significance of the ancient customs thus invented later, but rather the original significance which remained more or less obscure in these relics. There is only one way to recover it – the application of the comparative method.

There is another point the importance of which must not be overlooked. The ancient law of division had its own history of development. Its original form is to be traced back to the hunting period, when the division was chiefly the division of food. But it persisted, though in more or less modified form, up to the earlier phases of the pastoral and agricultural period. This is borne out by Thomson's[272] outstanding analysis of how this same ancient law gave the early Greeks the conception of the goddess Moira. His account needs to be read in full, not only because it is a masterpiece of modern interpretation but, more particu-

[270] Engels OF 259ff. [271] Winternitz HIL i. 127.
[272] AA 38ff. cf. SAGS i. 297-347.

larly, because what has become clear by his analysis of the Greek evidences has very important light to throw on what still remains obscure about our Vedic literatures. We can quote his evidences only in fragments and his conclusion in bare outline:

> The basic meaning of the word *moira* is a share or portion.... With *moira* is associated another word, *lachos,* a portion given or received by the process of casting lots. One of the Moirai (goddesses of Fate) bore the name of Lachesis, the goddess of Allotment. In this sense, *lachos* is synonymous with *kleros,* which, commonly used of a lot or holding of land, originally denoted a piece of wood used for casting lots....
>
> The Attic clan of Gephyraioi was descended from a branch of the stock of Kadmos which had settled in Boiotia, where 'it was allotted the portion of Tanagra'. (This can possibly be understood in the light of how the tribes of Israel occupied the Promised Land): the land was to be distributed by lot among the tribes, and the territory of each tribe was to be sub-divided by lot among the 'families' of clans.
>
> In the seventh Olympian, Pindar relates how the island of Rhodes was divided into three *moirai* by the sons of Helios. That these three moirai correspond to the three immigrant tribes is clear from the Homeric version of the same traditions. That they were distributed by lot is not expressly stated, but it may be inferred from the myth, which Pindar relates in the same poem, of the origin of the island: when the Olympian gods cast lots for the newly-conquered world, Helios was absent and so left without a*kleros*....
>
> Booty was distributed in the same way. Just as the island of Rhodes, allotted to Helios, is described by Pindar as his *lachos* or *geras,* his lot or his privilege, so the same terms—*moira* or *lachos, geras* or *time* — are applied to the share of the spoils allotted to each warrior. The process of distribution is called, as before, a *dasmos*...
>
> As it was with land and booty, so it was with food. In ancient times, so Plutarch writes, when meals were administered by Moira or Lachesis on the principle of equality, everything was decently and liberally arranged; and in support of this contention he points out that the old word for a meal meant properly a 'division'....
>
> Plutarch goes on to remark that the equality of the common meal was destroyed in course of time by the growth of luxury but conquered world, Helios was absent and so left without a *kleros*....
>
> It may therefore be concluded that in the applicaion to food, booty and land the idea of Moira reflects the collective distribution of wealth through three successive stages in the evolution of tribal society. Oldest of all was the distribution of food, which goes back to the hunting period. Next came the distribution of chattels and inanimate movables acquired by warfare, which was a development of hunting; and, last, the division of land for the purposes of agriculture. The use of the lot was, of course, a guarantee of equality. The goods were divided as equally as possible, and then the portions were distributed by a process which, since it lay outside human control, was impartial. And for the same reason it was regarded as magical, as an appeal to the Moirai or spirits of the lot, who determined each man's portion. With the growth of private property, the use of the lot became increasingly restricted, and the popular

conception of the Moirai was modified accordingly. They became the goddesses who determined for each man his lot in life.[273]

We may now return to consider the Vedic materials. These take us back to a very dim antiquity when even the language of the Vedic people was in the making. As indicated by the actual uses in the *Rig Veda* and corroborated by the *Nighantu*, distinct words were then not necessarily employed to express distinct ideas, particularly to differentiate between the idea of food, material wealth and the cow. Thus, if we are at all to trust the author of the *Nighantu*, – and this we must, if for no other reason than his nearness to the *Rig Veda* – the words *brahman, sravas* or *yasas* could have meant either food or material wealth in general, and the word *ila* may have meant speech, earth, food or cow. Evidently, these refer us back to a period when the distinction between the idea of food and the idea of material wealth in general did not gain special signifiance, food being still the predominant form of wealth known to these people. Under these circumstances, when we come across a reference to the division of wealth in the *Rig Veda*, as we frequently do, we cannot with certainty deny that the reference was to the division of food. But we may turn to more specific evidences.

One of the words for material wealth is *varya*. Along with its derivatives, it occurs no less than sixty-nine times in the *Rig-Veda*. Judging from the fact that it often occurs in the plural (*varyanam*) and further that Sayana interpreted this plural form sometimes to mean wealth in the form of cattle (*gavadi dhananam*)[274] and sometimes again to mean wealth in the form of crops (*vrihi-yavadinam*),[275] it may be presumed that the word represented an advanced conception of wealth in general. What we need take note of here is the fact that the word still concealed within itself the primitive communistic conception that wealth was collectively owned and meant to be shared out. The word is derived from the root *vrim*, meaning 'to divide' (*sambhaktau*).[276] *Varya*, in other words, meant that which was by nature divisible. Thus the ancient law of division gave the Vedic people one of the words for wealth.

As occurring in the *Rig Veda*, the word has usually the meaning of wealth without any specific implication of division

[273] AA. 38-44.
[274] viii. 71. 11.
[275] x. 9. 5.
[276] Sayana on *RV* i. 24. 3.

or sharing out. But at least in one place, this word, meaning wealth, is explicitly connected with the ancient law of division from which it arose:

> We strongly ask for our share from you, O Savitri, the increaser and the perennial custodian of our wealth (*abhi tva deva savitah isanam varyanam sada avan bhaagam imahe*).[277]

This *rik* is not probably very old. It is usually placed in the middle stratum of the *Rig Veda*. However, Sunahsepa, the poet-seer to whom this was attributed, sang this while cursing the injustice of his contemporary society and invoking the memory of the past; thus the desire expressed for the share (*bhaagam*) could have been a part of the latter. We shall return later to the interesting legend of Sunahsepa. For the present, we refer to another *rik* attributed to him with a similar reference to the same ancient law of division: 'By thy strength, O divider of wealth (*bhaga-bhaktasya*), we begin to multiply the wealth exceedingly.[278] This, too, was similarly addressed to Savitri and this is the only occurrence of the epithet *bhaga-bhakta* in the whole of the *Rig Veda*. And the epithet has its own interest. For, in the *Rig Veda*, *bhaga* means either simply wealth or specifically the share (*bhaaga*). Therefore, *bhaga-bhakta* meant either the divider of wealth or the apportioner of the shares. Here, again, we have the same interesting history concealed behind the word *bhaga*: if the word for 'wealth' was also the word for 'share,' the implication is that there was originally no wealth that was not shared out.

This epithet of Savitri might have been unique. But not the function implied by it. Agni, in the form of Citrabhanu, was asked to be the apportioner.[279] Savitri was invoked as the divider or apportioner of varied wealth.[280] Usas was addressed as going 'today' to divide wealth among the human beings.[281] Agni and Indra divided wealth in the past.[282] Savitri was described as one who, while coming, divided shares (*bhaga*), wealth (*ratna*) and longevity (*ayu*).[283] Indra alone is the apportioner of wealth.[284] When Indra was dividing small as well as great wealth, both his hands were full of wealth.[285] 'We' are

[277] i. 24. 3.
[278] i. 24. 5.
[279] i. 27. 6.
[280] i. 22. 7.
[281] i. 123. 3.
[282] i. 109. 5.
[283] v. 49. 1.
[284] vii. 26. 4.
[285] vii. 37. 3.

going to be present today when Savitri would be dividing wealth and give 'us.'[286] Indra was asked to fulfil the *bhagah* or share of those who praised him.[287] The *rik* in which this desire was expressed runs like a refrain in the oldest stratum of the *Rig Veda.* 'O Soma, send us the shares (*bhaagam*) of wealth by dint of your wit (*manasa*); save us in battle (*gavistau*[288]).' 'O Nasatyas, come towards us carrying wealth, food and heroic sons! You too give us — the dwellers in the land of Jahnu — three shares of food a day.'[289] 'O Agni, come towards us with friendship and give us profuse wealth in glorious shares (*suvacam bhaagam*[290]).' 'O Ribhus, the men desiring your friendship want you; you, by your *mayas,* scatter the shares of *yajna* (*yajniyam bhaagam*) which can overcome the enemy.'[291] 'We ask for our varied shares (*bhaaga*) of Savitri, the *bhaga* (the custodian of shares), who bestows wealth.'[292] 'The Maruts, with strength, are dividing Indra's wealth among those that are already born and those that are yet to be born — may each of us get this as a (*prati bhaagam na didhima*).'[293] 'O Indra, the *asura,* we indeed ask of you shares (*bhaagam*) of wealth; you scatter happiness amongst us.'[294] 'O Indra, give us share (*amsa*) of the wealth, which was obstructed, as to one who has been promised. As a person with a stick shakes down a ripe fruit from a tree, so you send wealth towards us.'[295]

These are only a few examples of the Vedic gods in the role of apportioners, the custodians of the ancient principle of communism. And this will give us some idea of the veneration felt by the Vedic poets for this ancient principle itself. It was, therefore, only natural for them to elevate the very concept of share or portion to the status of gods. This was the source of the two minor Vedic deities, Bhaga and Amsa. We quote Macdonell:[296]

> The word *amsa,* which occurs less than a dozen times in the *Rig Veda,* is almost synonymous with *bhaga,* expressing both the concrete sense of 'share', 'portion' and that of 'apportioner.' It is found but three times as the name of a god, only one of these passages stating anything about him besides his name. Agni is here said to be Amsa, a bountiful (*bhajayu*) god at the feast (ii. 1. 4).

[286] vii. 40. 1.
[287] ii. 11. 21; 15. 10; 16. 9; 17. 9; 18. 9; 19. 9; 20. 9.
[288] i. 91. 23.
[289] i. 116. 19.
[290] iii. 1. 19.
[291] iii. 60. 1.
[292] v. 82. 3.
[293] viii. 99. 3.
[294] viii. 90. 6.
[295] iii. 45. 4.
[296] VM 45-6.

It may be noted that the world *bhajayu* means 'one prone to divide' and this, as an epithet for Agni, occurred in the oldest stratum of the *Rig Veda*. But Bhaga had a comparatively greater importance as a Vedic god. Here is how Macdonell summed up of the evidences:

> One hymn of the *Rig Veda* (vii. 41) is devoted chiefly to the praise of Bhaga, though some other deities are invoked in it as well; and the name of the god occurs over sixty times. The word means 'dispenser, giver' and appears to be used in this sense more than a score of times attributively, in several cases with the name of Savitri. The god is also regularly conceived in the Vedic hymns as a distributor of wealth, comparisons with Bhaga being generally intended to express glorification of Indra's and Agni's bounty. The word *bhaga* also occurs about twenty times in the *Rig Veda* with the sense of 'bounty, wealth, fortune,' and the ambiguity is sometimes played upon. Thus in one passage (vii. 41. 2) where Bhaga is called the distributor (*vidharta*), it is stated that men say of the god, 'May I share in *bhaga*' (*bhagam bhaksi*). In another verse (v. 46. 6) in which he is termed the 'dispenser' (*vibhakta*, derived from the same root *bhaj*), he is invoked to be full of bounty (*bhagavan*) to his worshippers.[297]

The evidences so far cited relate to the sharing or division of 'material wealth in general.' General words for wealth could have, in those days, meant food, cattle, water, fodder and even booty. Therefore, these evidences, by themselves, do not help us to understand the different stages of the development of the ancient law of division, as revealed by Thomson's analysis of the Greek materials. But the other evidences do help. For, in other cases we come across the use of words with more specific meanings or sometimes the same general words in more specific contexts.

One of the specific words for food in the *Rig Veda* is *vaja*. Of course, according to the *Nighantu*[298] this could as well mean strength (*vala*). But as occurring in the context of division or sharing out, it could not have meant the latter. And here are some examples where the word is used in the context of division:

Indra is clearly described as the divider (*vibhakta*) of the shares (*bhaagam*) of food (*vajam*).[299] As the divider of food (*vajanam vibhakta*), again, he is the mightiest among the gods.[300] But the most significant reference to the division of food along with a distinct mention of common meal is to be found in the *Atharva Veda*:[301]

297 *Ib*. 45.
298 ii. 9.
299 iii. 49. 4.
300 vi. 36. 1.
301 iii. 30. 6. (tr.) Whitney AV i. 138-9.

> Your drinking (be) the same, in common your share of food; in the same harness do I join you together; worship ye Agni united, like spokes about a nave.

Significantly enough, this stanza of the *Atharva Veda* is immediately preceded by one with an equally distinct reference to collective labour. Here it is in Whitney's translation:

> Having superiors, intentful, be ye not divided, accomplishing together, moving on with joint labour; come hither speaking what is agreeable one to another; I make you united, like-minded.

The *Atharva Veda* is commonly referred to as a collection of spells or charms. The magical rites in which these were to be applied were explained in the later ritual literature as the *Kausika Sutra* of the *Atharva Veda*. According to this text, the hymn (*AV;* iii. 30) we have just quoted heads a series of seven Atharvan charms, which are designated as *sam manasyani*, 'designed to produce harmony.'[302] These could not be the products of the collective life where harmony within the group was an accomplished fact. Therefore, the hymns as well as the magical rites in which they were employed are to be understood in the context of a community which was no longer an undivided whole. It is not of little significance, therefore, that the magical rites meant to ensure harmony in a society divided against itself should be accompanied not only with poems in which was invoked the memory of the ancient common meal and the division of food, but also with the actual enactment of the ancient practice of sharing the common meal. This is evident from Bloomfield's summary of the *Kausika Sutra* version of the ritual:

> A jar full of water anointed with the dregs of ghee, is carried about the (quarrelling) throng and poured out in their midst. The same proceedings are undertaken with a jar full of brandy (*sura*). (They who desire peace) are given to eat the pickled flesh of a young cow three years old. Food, brandy, and water from the (public?) drinking-place are anointed with the dregs of *ghee* (and consumed).[303]

By enacting in ritual the practice of ancient communism they hoped to revive the consciousness of collectivity characteristic of those days. But what was the reason of the breakdown of the ancient collectivity, necessitating the ritual imitation of it? It was obviously the development of the productive technique, which, in the case of the Vedic people, had its be-

302 SBE xlii. 361ff.

303 *Ib*. xlii. 362.

ginnings in the adoption of the pastoral economy. But it must have taken a long period for this new productive technique to undermine fully the ancient relations of equality based upon the ancient law of equal distribution. It is no wonder, therefore, that the *Rig Veda* itself should retain references to the division of the cattle. 'Make us the holders of shares (*kridhi nah bhaaga-dheyam*) of the herds of cattle which you (Indra), with the sixty-three Maruts, multiplied; we approach you.'[304] Similarly, Brahmanaspati was referred to as dividing the cows among the human beings with the mighty technique (*mahi iva ritih*).[305]

The tendency of the pastoral economy to generate war and inter-tribal raids is well known. We have already noted how in the *Rig Veda* the word *gavisti,* the desire for cow, meant war. To go among the cows, too, meant going to war. The *Rig Veda* is naturally full of references of war and inter-tribal raids, generally under the leadership of Indra. However, what needs to be noted here is that the ancient law of division remained operative even after the development of these raids and the Vedic poets were never tired of desiring the shares of the booty. Evidently, it took a long time for them to forget the memory of the ancient law.

Indra approached while dividing the wealth looted from the aliens that were without rituals.[306] Maruts were asked to make 'us' sharers in the conquered wealth.[307] 'O Indra, united with you we defeat the enemies; you look after our shares (*amsa*)' from battle to battle.[308] Agni, with the help of the Asvins, conquered in the past 'our' shares in the battle.[309] Along with Bhaga and Savitri, Indra was aked to give shares of the conquered wealth.[310] And so on.

The apportioners here, as also in the cases previously quoted, were the gods. However, there are also instances where *the poets attributed the same function to human beings.* 'Give us, O Indra, wealth accompanied by sons; by dividing wealth we shall attain greatness (*rayah vantarah brihatah syama*).'[311] In another *rik* the people themselves appear to be the apportioners.[312] There are even *riks* in which the relation between

[304] viii. 96. 8.
[305] ii. 24. 14.
[306] i. 103. 6.
[307] vii. 56. 21.
[308] i. 102. 4.
[309] i. 112. 1.
[310] v. 42. 5.
[311] iii. 30. 18.
[312] ii. 13. 4.

the gods and men seems to be reversed: the human beings are here the apportioners and the gods only the receivers of shares. Here is an example:

> O Agni, may the *yajamanas,* full of food, spread food under your directions; may we increase food; may we increase food in battles and give its shares to the gods (*sanema vajam samithesu bhaagam devesu dadhanah*).[313]

Such a rendering of the *rik* will be objected to. This, it will be argued, misses the crucial point. The word for share (*bhaaga*) is indeed there; but it has the sense of being oblation assigned to the gods. This may be true. But the point is that we cannot stop here. We have to ask ourselves: how the word for 'share' could also mean 'oblation' to the gods? In answering this question, we are led to the strange prehistory of the Vedic conception of oblation itself.

'Oblation' being necessarily connected with the gods, its prehistory could only be related to the prehistory of the gods themselves. We have already reviewed some of the evidences that lead us to a definite view concerning the latter. That the Vedic gods originally possessed the characteristic traits of human beings and that they maintained warm comradely relation with them were known to the Vedic poets. If this was so, and if, further, according to the inviolable law of the ancient society, all the human beings were entitled to an equal share in the material wealth of the community, the gods themselves could not have been outside the sphere of influence of this ancient law. That is, conceived originally as human beings, they too must have been entitled to their own shares and must have received them duly. But their progressive elevation to the status of gods was necessarily accompained by a process of dehumanisation. But the memory of the ancient law persisted with a peculiar tenacity. Even when they were conceived as remoter deities, it was unthinkable for the poets to deny the gods their old claim to the shares. However, these shares could not any longer be conceived in the same form as of old. For the gods were no longer participating in the collective labour of the tribesmen. They were gradually remodelled in the image of the parasitical overlords. And thus the shares became 'oblations.' Only the word persisted, to remind us of the ancient reality.

Our only evidence for this is necessarily circumstantial —

[313] i. 73. 5.

the repeated reference to the division of material wealth among the gods and the mention of the oblations as but fixed shares for the gods in the later *yajnas*. However, our presumption becomes stronger in view of the fact, that in passages of the more archaic stratum we have the picture of *gods dividing among themselves the shares of their own material wealth.*

Brahmanaspati divided the cows also among the gods.[314] Vayu received his fixed share both among men and among gods.[315] He received his own portion of the oblation.[316] The portion of Pusan is 'this' goat.[317] Asvins were receiving their own portions.[318] The Vahnis bore the share of gods in the *yajnam*.[319] Brahmanaspati scatters the shares of *yajna* among the gods.[320] Agni is asked to receive his share after defeating the enemy.[321] Which, it is asked of Indra, is your share and which your food?[322] He is asked to have his own share.[323] The word *bhaaga-dheya*, which might have meant either one receiving share (by proxy?), or the prescribed share itself, was used almost indiscriminately with reference to gods and men. 'O Agni, the wise men do not grudge you your share (*tava bhaaga-dheyam*).'[324] In another *rik*,[325] the same word *bhaaga-dheya* is used as referring definitely to the human beings. '(O Visva-devas), I have been appointed the *hota;* tell me of the *bhaaga-dheya* as you ascertained your *bhaaga* or share.'[326] In the place where the two (i.e., husband and wife; therefore, the reference could have been to the place of *yajna* as later understood) sat, the gods took their shares (*davah dahire bhaaga-dheyam*).'[327] To Indra was given the share (*amsa*) of wealth that was hidden.[328] 'The two (Indra and Agni) increase daily like the mortals; these two gods, for getting horse, come forward with their *amsa* (the word here appears to mean "the claim to share").'[329]

In the tenth book, which is the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda,* the gods' shares clearly assume the form of oblation. And so is the sense also in the first book which, too, is a later stratum of the collection. But in the *riks* of the other books, parti-

314 ii. 24. 14.
315 i. 135. 2. 316 i. 135. 3.
317 i. 162. 3. 318 i. 183. 4.
319 i. 20. 8. 320 ii. 23. 2.
321 ii. 10. 6. 322 vi. 22. 4.
323 viii. 36. 1-6. The second part of these *riks* runs as a refrain.
324 iii. 28. 4. 325 viii. 96. 8.
326 x. 52. 1. 327 x. 114. 3.
328 ii. 19. 5. 329 v. 86. 5.

cularly those of the second which forms the oldest stratum, it is doubtful whether oblation meant quite the same thing. If Brahmanaspati divided the cows among the gods, the shares received by them could hardly have been oblations in the later sense. Similarly, in the fifth book, which also formed part of the oldest stratum, Indra and Agni were depicted as pressing their claims to the shares of horses. This is certainly not the picture of the priests offering oblations to the gods. Do these evidences, therefore, suggest that the more we move backward to the older strata of the *Rig Veda* the clearer becomes the pre-history of the Vedic oblations? Such a possibility cannot be entirely ruled out.

Leaving this question for the moment, we may now turn to another interesting problem. There are suggestions in the *Rig Veda* that the venue of this ancient practice of division was the *vidatha*. We shall see that in spite of all sorts of conflicting views as to its true nature the word meant only the assembly. Here is only one evidence. The word *samiti*, unmistakably meaning the assembly, was also used as a synonym for the word *vidatha*. And this circumstance appears to go decisively against Ludwig's view,[330] viz. that *vidatha* meant some kind of asylum. And here are some *riks* that indicate that the *vidatha* was often the venue for the division of wealth.

> Ah! Let the happiness of the assembly (*srustih vidathya*) come to us; we offer praise to the speedy ones; because today Savitri, the custodian of wealth, is in the act of sharing out this wealth (*asya ratninah vibhage*).[331]
>
> Suparna gives the shares of water continuously in the assembly (*vidatha*).[332]
>
> O god (Agni), for proper enjoyment you disbursed your wealth in shares in the assembly (*tvam amsah vidathe deva bhajayuh*).[333]
>
> O Agni, this assembly (*samiti*) of ours shines among the gods; you the custodian of food (*svadhavan*), divide wealth among us here and give us shares full of wealth (*ratna vibhajasi bhaagam nah atra vasumantam vitat*).[334]

Thus the assembly was often referred to as the place where the division of wealth took place. Now, another word for the assembly was '*sabha*', which also meant the place where the Vedic people used to draw lots. Could it, therefore, be that the act of drawing the lot had the same original significance for the Vedic people as it had with the ancient Greeks? Was the draw-

330 Macdonell & Keith VI ii. 296-7.
331 vii. 40. 1.
332 i. 164. 21.
333 ii 1. 4.
334 x. 11. 8.

ing of the lot, in other words, conceived originally to ensure equality or impartiality in the division of wealth? Such a possibility will be strongly doubted. The use of the lot, *aksa,* as found in the *Rig Veda,* is usually taken to mean dicing in the sense of gambling. This led Macdonell and Keith[335] to assert, 'Dicing, along with horse-racing, was one of the main amusements of the Vedic Indian.'

There is no denying that the Vedic people knew gambling and the lot (*aksa*) used for it. But at what stage of their development did it come into vogue?

There is the well-known *aksa-sukta* of the *Rig Veda*[336] which will show to what length the Vedic people sometimes went in their craze for gambling: a gambler was lamenting here the loss of all his property, including his wife. But it should not be forgotten that this appeared only in the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda.* Besides, there are certain indications about this *sukta* itself that cannot be explained on the simple assumption that *aksa* or the lot was known to the Vedic people as serving the only the purpose of gambling. The author of the *Anukramani* saw that the *sukta* as a whole was quite complex: parts of it were ecstatic praises of *aksa* and these were connected with the theme of agriculture, while the others were designed to denounce *aksa,* which was connected with gambling. On the other hand, in accordance with the general tendency of mentioning a deity for each *sukta,* the author had to mention one to whom this was supposed to be addressed to. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have probably said that *aksa,* or the lot itself, was the deity of this *sukta.* But he could not do so, because *aksa* was connected here with a dual function and consequently dual attitude was expressed towards it. Confronted with this problem, he simply said that the deity of this *sukta* was *aksa-krisi-prasamsa aksa-kitava-ninda ca,* lit., 'the praise of the lot as (related to) agriculture (*krisi*) and also the denunciation of the lot as (related to) gambling (*kitava*).' It may be noted here that the praise of agriculture in this *sukta* is itself an indication of how late it was; for it is already argued by our modern scholars that the Vedic people took to agriculture at a considerably late period.

This praise of the lot as related to agriculture, to say the least, is remarkable. No less remarkable, however, is the cir-

335 VI i. 2. 336 x. 34.

cumstance that the Vedic scholars have generally preferred to leave it unnoticed. The reason presumably is that they have almost invariably started with the assumption that *aksa* meant gambling, and that it could under no circumstance have any function other than gambling. However, if this assumption were true, 'the praise of the lot as (related to) agriculture,' would hardly make any sense. Therefore, the words *aksa-krisi-samsa* had to be ignored.

On the other hand, if we try to understand this from the point of view of what is known in general about the backward peoples surviving in the world today, we may not be obliged to dismiss the suggestion summarily. Among them the lot does have an important bearing on agriculture, the use of it being designed to ensure equality or impartiality in the periodical redistribution of cultivable land. The following is Baden-Powell's account of the practice as it persisted in Peshawar down to modern times:

> The areas were taken by drawing lots.... If the land to be allotted was variable in quality, the clan authorities would arrange a number of circles or series, consisting of good, middling or indifferent soils or distinguished in some other way. Then the groups of sharers would have to take their lands partly out of each series... But in any case, inspite of the soil classification, inequality in the holdings was not altogether excluded, and so a system of periodical exchange or redistribution was long followed.[337]

It is of course impossible to be certain that the same or similar practice was indicated by the *Anukramani* in its reference to the lot as connected with agriculture. But it is important to remember, as Kosambi[338] has pointed out, that, because of their stunted economic development, some of the Vedic tribes persisted in 'the early Vedic tribal stage' down to the times of the Greek narrators (330 B.C.). This is how Strabo described the practice of communism among them:

> Among other tribes again the land is cultivated in common, and when the crops are collected, each person takes a load for his support throughout the year. The remainder of the produce is burned.

There might have been some misunderstanding or exaggeration about the suggestion of burning the surplus. But the picture of primitive communism is clear. And if the Vedic tribes in the Punjab that had atrophied (cf. the *vraatyas* of the Vraatyastoma of the *Tandya Maha Brahmana*) retained the communistic principle in pratice, the implication is that all the Vedic tribes

337 IVC 253-5. For other references to the same or similar practices see Thomson SAGS i. 305ff. 338 ISIH 91-2.

were maintaining it during the earlier stages of their development. And if this was so, we may infer that the lot originally served the same purpose in their lives as it is known to do among the tribes still surviving in the primitive pre-class society.

This is of course a presumption and, pending further researches, no direct evidence can possibly be adduced in proof of it. Nevertheless there are certain circumstantial considerations which we cannot overlook.

First, if we discard this possibility, we shall be left with the only alternative view that the lot or *aksa* was designed by the early Vedic people for the exclusive purpose of gambling. But it is impossible to explain on the basis of such an assumption how the *aksa* could become an object of such stupendous reverence as is evidenced in the Vedic literatures. In the well-known *aksa-sukta* itself, we find the following addressed to *aksa*:

(O Aksa) thou who hast become the leader of your great *gana* and the first chief (*raja*) of the *vraata*,—I address him and I declare that I am not withholding wealth; I am, with my ten fingers stretched, speaking the truth (*rita*).[339]

It may be difficult for us to be certain about the exact meaning of all the points here. However, the promise of not withholding wealth might have indicated something other than gambling, unless of course we uncritically agree with the standard interpretation that the poet suggested some kind of reckless all-out staking, which, however, leaves unexplained why the poet should express so much reverance for the act. Elsewhere, as Macdonell and Keith[340] have pointed out, the Vedic gods were compared to the throws of dice as giving or destroying wealth.

Secondly, perhaps the most decisive evidence to disprove the theory that *aksa* was originally used for the exclusive purpose of gambling, is the ritual importance of it (*aksa*) in the Vedic literatures. There were at least two extremely important Vedic rituals, namely the Rajasuya and the Agnadheya, in which *aksa* played a very important role. It is not necessary for us to quote the details of these rituals; Macdonell and Keith[341] have already collected the major references to the use of *aksa* in these rituals. Our point simply is, that only those ancestral institutions and practices of the Vedic peoples that originally had definite economic purposes could find their sanctuary in

339 x. 34. 12.
340 VI i. 3.
341 *Ib.* i. 1.

their later rituals and gambling in the modern sense could not have that purpose; on the other hand, as the technique of impartial distribution the use of the lot is known to have such a purpose among the backward peoples, and the survival of this is clearly traceable in the history of other peoples up to the upper stage of barbarism. Marx[342] referred to the well-known passage in Tacitus: '"*Arva per annos mutant et superest ager*," which means: they exchange the fields, *arva*, (by lot, hence *sortes* [lot] in all the later Legas Barbarum (law codes of the barbarians) and common land (*ager* as *ager publicus* contrasted with *arva*) remains over.'

Lastly, as we have already noticed, the Vedic assembly was often mentioned as the venue for casting the lot, and this same assembly was the place where the division of wealth took place. One who drew the lot was called *sabha-sthanu*,[343] lit., the pillar of the assembly. With the belief that the throw of the dice could mean nothing but gambling, modern scholars were driven to interpret it as 'a satirical name derived from the gambler's devotion to the dicing place.'[344] But one looks in vain for even a tinge of satire in the texts themselves; the references, it must be remembered, occur in the context of the discussion of the Vedic rituals, and it is impermissible to imagine that the authors of these texts, while describing what they considered to be the most sacred of all their preoccupations, had any reason to indulge in satire. 'The hall (i.e., the place where the Vedic people held assembly) was clearly used for dicing, presumably when the assembly was not transacting public business.'[345] But, as we are going to see, the assembly was to the Vedic people the organ of tribal administration, and, if it was so, the use of the lot as the technique of ensuring impartiality in the matter of equidistribution could have been one of the important features of the transaction of 'public business' itself. This hypothesis does not exclude the possibility of the dice gradually developing into a gambling instrument with the progressive disintegration of the tribal constitution and the emergence of private property.

9. Sabha and Samiti : Administration

Sabha is the name of the assembly of the Vedic Indians as well as of the "hall" where they met in assembly. It is often

342 SC 242.
343 Macdonell & Keith VI i.157.
344 *Ib.* Cf. *Ib.* ii. 426.
345 *Ib.* ii. 426.

mentioned in the *Rig Veda* and later, but its exact character is not certain.'[346] As against this, our argument is that the clue to its exact character can be found in Morgan's classical study of the tribal administration.

The council was the great feature of ancient society, Asiatic, European and American, from the institution of the gens (clan) in savagery to civilization. It was the instrument of government as well as the supreme authority over the gens, the tribe, and the confederacy. Ordinary affairs were adjusted by the chiefs; but those of general interest were submitted to the determination of a council. As the council sprang from the gentile organisation the two institutions have come down together through the ages. The Council of Chiefs represents the ancient method of evolving the wisdom of mankind and applying it to human affairs. Its history, gentile, tribal and confederate, would express the growth of the idea of government in its whole development, until political society supervened into which the council, changed into a senate, was transmitted.

The simplest and lowest form of the council was that of the gens. It was a democratic assembly because every adult male and female member had a voice upon all questions brought before it. It elected and deposed its sachem and chiefs, it elected Keepers of the Faith, it condoned or avenged the murder of a gentile, and it adopted persons into the gens. It was the germ of the higher council of the tribe, and of that still higher of the confederacy, each of which was composed exclusively of chiefs as representatives of the gentes.[347]

The tribal administration, in short, is maintained by the tribal council at all levels. The basic unit of the tribe is the clan and its affairs are conducted by the democratic assembly of all the adult members of the clan. This assembly, elected from among its members a sachem, i.e., a leader in matters of internal administration and certain war chiefs. These war chiefs are 'raised to office for personal bravery, for wisdom in affairs, or for eloquence in council,' and were usually the 'superior class in ability, though not in authority.'[348] The council had also the right of deposing the sachem and chiefs. These offices, therefore, though 'normally for life, the tenure was practically during good behaviour, in consequence of the power to depose... Unworthy behaviour, followed by a loss of confidence, furnished a sufficient ground for deposition. When a sachem or chief had been deposed in due form by a council of his gens, he ceased thereafter to be recognised as such, and became thenceforth a private person.'[349] Commented Morgan :

(American) Indian chiefs are described as lords by Spanish writers, and invested with rights over lands and over persons they

[346] *Ib.*

[347] Morgan AS 84-5.

[348] *Ib.* 71.

[349] *Ib.* 73.

> never possessed. It is a misconception to style an (American) Indian chief a lord in the European sense, because it implies a condition of society that did not exist. A lord holds a rank and title by hereditary right, secured to him by special legislation in derogation of the rights of the people as a whole. To this rank and title, since the overthrow of feudalism, no duties are attached which may be claimed by the king or the kingdom as a matter of right. On the contrary, an (American) Indian chief holds an office, not by hereditary right, but by election from a constituency, which retained the right to depose him for cause. The office carried with it the obligation to perform certain duties for the benefit of the constituency. He had no authority over the persons or property or lands of the members of the gens. It is thus seen that no analogy exists between a lord and his title, and an (American) Indian chief and his office. One belongs to political society, and represents an aggression of the few upon the many; while the other belongs to gentile society and is founded upon the common interests of the members of the gens. Unequal privileges find no place in the gens, phratry or tribe.[350]

The tribe is composed of a number of clans. The affairs affecting the interest of the tribe as a whole is conducted by a higher council composed of the elected chiefs from the different clans. Apart from electing these chiefs for the tribal council, the members of the clan, — particularly the elders therein — elect the 'Keepers of the Faith', the function of whom is to superintend what Morgan, with some hesitation,[351] called the religious functions of the clans. The hesitation was felt because, as he himself observed, the American Indian tribes 'had not attained that religious development which was so strongly impressed upon the gentes of the later tribes;[352] i.e. the gentes of the Grecian and Latin tribes. 'With the progress of mankind out of the Lower into the Middle, and more especially out of the latter into the Upper Status of barbarism, the gens became more the centre of religious influence and the source of religious development.'[353] In short, the nearer the stage of tribal disintegration the clearer became the mark of religious beliefs. That is why Morgan found it safer to characterise the so-called religious functions of the tribes simply as their '*festivals*.' Here is Morgan's description of the functions of the 'Keepers of the Faith.'

> Each gens furnished a number of 'Keepers of the Faith,' both male and female, who together were charged with the celebration of these festivals (of the six annual festivals of the Iroquois, namely Maple, Planting, Berry, Green-Corn, Harvest, and New Year's Festivals) .... They designated the days for holding the festivals, made the necessary arrangements for the celebration, and conducted the

[350] *Ib.* 208

[351] Morgan put a query after 'religious rites in the gens.' AS 81.

[352] *Ib.* [353] *Ib.* 82.

ceremonies in conjunction with the sachems and chiefs of the tribe, who were, *ex officio*, 'Keepers of the Faith'. With no official head. and none of the marks of a priesthood, their functions were equal. The female 'Keepers of the Faith' were more especially charged with the preparation of the feast, which was provided at all councils at the close of each day for all persons in attendance. It was a dinner in common. The religious rites appertaining to these festivals . . . need not be considered further than to remark, that their worship was one of thanksgiving, with invocations to the Great Spirit, and to the Lesser Spirits to continue to them the blessings of life.[354]

To sum up: There were, among the Iroquois Indians, the clan-assembly composed of all the members of the clan, the tribal council composed of the elected chiefs from the clans and a body of the Keepers of the Faith 'selected by the wise men and matrons of each gens (clan).' The first of these was to conduct the internal administration of the clan under the leadership of the elected sachem. 'It was a democratic assembly because every adult male and female member had a voice upon all questions brought before it.'[355] The tribal council of the chiefs was to consider mainly the questions of the tribal war and the body of the Keepers of the Faith to conduct the festivals and rituals. Evidently, the last contained the germs of the later priest-class, as the chiefs were the precursors of the later war-lords.

We may now proceed to consider the Vedic materials. Granting that the Vedic peoples, too, were originally organised in tribes, it is only logical to think that they, too, must have once passed through a stage of similar organisation, though, for reasons repeatedly referred to, this must have had a pronounced patriarchal bias. Thus, their priest-class of the later times — the Brahmanas — could have only developed from their Keepers of the Faith[356] just as their warring rulers — the Rajanyas and still later the Ksatriyas — developed from their war-chiefs. And if this be true, however gorgeous might have been the epithets commonly applied to the Vedic chiefs (*raja, senani, samrat*, etc.), they were not originally rulers or kings in the later sense. In any case, it is extremely doubtful whether these classes, as the Brahmana and the Ksatriya castes of later times, had already developed during the age of the *Rig Veda*.[357] The only clear

[354] *Ib.* 82. [355] *Ib.* 85.

[356] The interesting similarity between this and the Vedic words *ritapah* (i. 113. 12; vi. 3. 1; vii. 20. 6) and *ritayavah* (v. 8. 1; v. 54. 12; x. 115.7) should not be overlooked.

[357] CHI i. 92ff.; VA 385ff.

reference to these as castes in the *Rig Veda* is in the famous *Purusa-sukta,*[358] admittedly of a very late date. Now, if during the earlier period of the *Rig Veda* the tribal chiefs did not develop into the later Ksatriyas, or the Keepers of the Faith into the later Brahmanas – then it is only logical to expect to find in that literature elements of the original glory of the clan-council and the tribal assembly. As a matter of fact, we do find this.

In the *Rig Veda,* one of the words for the assembly is *sabha.* Another word, *samiti,* also unmistakably meant the assembly, though, as Jayaswal[359] has rightly pointed out, 'the references to the *samiti* in the *Rig Veda* are to be found only in portions which are considered to be the latest.' We shall presently see the possible significance of this. The word *vidatha,* too, meant the assembly, though it had some additional significance not without interest for us.

Modern scholars have already noted the importance of all these in the Vedic literatures. Owing, however, to their neglect of the comparative method, we are offered only a number of confusing conjectures concerning these. Macdonell and Keith[360] have prepared a list of such conjectures. We need not quote all. As specimens of these, we may discuss the confusion created by these two scholars.

Sabha, they said, was 'the assembly house of the people.'[361] Again, *samiti* is taken by them simply to mean the 'assembly of the people.'[362] Both the renderings are correct. What is not clear, however, is how at the same time they can venture the following comment:

> Accordnig to Ludwig, the *sabha* was an assembly not of all the people, but of the Brahmins and Maghavans (rich patrons). This view can be supported by the expressions *sabheva,* 'worthy of the assembly,' applied to a Brahmin, *rayih sabhavan,* 'wealth fitting for the assembly.'[363]

The implication evidently is that the *sabha* was the assembly of the aristocrats. Apart from the fact that this goes flatly against the meanings attached to the *sabha* and the *samiti* by the same scholars, the only evidence adduced in favour of this is nothing but the extremely doubtful interpretation of two verses of the *Rig Veda.* The text itself does nowhere indicate that the word *sabheya,* 'worthy of the assembly',

358 x. 90.
359 HP i. 13.
360 VI ii. 296, 426, 430, etc.
361 *Ib.* ii. 308.
362 *Ib.* ii. 415.
363 *Ib.* ii. 426-7.

is applicable to a Brahmana. The *rik*[364] referred to by Macdonell and Keith contains only *sabheyah viprah,* and even Sayana, the most Brahmanical of the interpreters, took the word *viprah* to mean *medhavi,* the talented. Besides, how can we at all speak of the Vedic *sabha* as an assembly of the Brahmanas and the Maghavans when the fact is that the Brahmana as a caste was yet to emerge during the age of the *Rig Veda*? Of course Macdonell and Keith would not subscribe to this view:

> It seems certain that in the *Rig Veda* this Brahmana, or Brahmin, is already a separate caste, differing from the warrior and agricultural castes. The texts regularly claim for them a superiority to the Ksatriya caste, and the Brahmin is able by his spells or manipulation of the rite to embroil the people and the warriors or the different sections of the warriors.[365]

But the question is: which texts and of what period? Interestingly enough, Macdonell and Keith did not refer to any passage of the *Rig Veda* itself in support of such a view. Instead of that, they simply referred to the different recensions of the *Yajur Veda* and certain *Brahmanas* like the *Aitareya,* the *Satapatha* and the *Pancavimsa.* Such texts cannot prove the emergence of the Brahmana caste in the *Rig Veda,* for all these are much later than the *Rig Veda* itself.

The possibility of the *sabha* being the assembly of the rich patrons (Maghavans), again, appears to be based only on a positive misunderstanding of the Vedic passages. The only *rik* mentioned by the two scholars in support of this conjecture contains, really speaking, nothing whatsoever to indicate such a possibility. It is true that the words *rayih* and *sabhavan* occur in it. But it must not be forgotten that both these were epithets for Agni, who was also invoked here as the multiplier of great wealth (*prithu-budhnah*) and a friend like the human beings (*nrivat-sakha*). We have already quoted the *rik* in full: 'O Agni, O Asura, this ritual of ours is full of cows, of sheep, of horses, of food and of offspring; may thou be always without anger, being in our assembly, a friend like a human being, possessing huge wealth and vast waters'. We have seen that this is one of the oldest *riks* in which the Vedic singers expressed their intense desire for what they considered to be the different forms of the material wealth; and the friendly invocation to Agni as a member of the assembly is there evidently because the *sabha* was the place for the performance of the ritual which, to

[364] ii. 24. 13. [365] VI. ii .81.

the Vedic singers, ensured the enhancement of such wealth. In any case, there is nothing here to justify the speculation that the *sabha* was the assembly only of the aristocrats, the rich patrons.

Here is another evidence to show that the mention of wealth and assembly in the same passage cannot by any means indicate that it was the assembly of the aristocrats alone. 'O Agni, this *samiti* is shining among the gods who perform the *yajna;* O you possessed of food, may we get here the shares full of wealth of the wealth which you divide.'[366] Obviously, the mention of share and division here are indicative of the tribal method of distribution.

Of course, this theory that the Vedic *sabha* was exclusively the assembly of the aristocrats was suggested by Ludwig; Macdonell and Keith were only finding possible further evidences. But what are the evidences adduced by Ludwig himself? He laid[367] stress on two *riks* in particular. These are:

> O Indra, your good-looking friend is possessed with horses, chariots and cows; being receipients of wealth, they always come together in the assembly (*sabha*) with food and are glad.[368]
>
> All the friends, along with the friendly ones fit for the assembly (*sabha-saha*), are glad because of the *soma;* this *soma* is the destroyer of the enemies, the increaser of food and is sufficient for the welfare of the possessor of food.[369]

Interestingly enough, both Macdonell and Keith thought the passages were quite vague.[370] There is, in any case, nothing here to suggest that the aristocrates, to the exclusion of the common people, were the only members of the *sabha.* Adjectives like *sabha-saha* were presumably used by the poets to refer to their own kinsmen as opposed to the aliens; there is hardly any indication that they were applied to one class as contrasted with the others.[371] And it would be wrong to make too much of the mere mention of wealth – of cows, chariots, horses and food – which we have seen is characteristic of the Vedic poets. Incidentally, even Sayana, while interpreting the word *sakhayah* (friends) as occurring in the second of the two *riks* above, said that it meant those who were equal in status and equal in knowledge. The suggestion, again, is the equalitarian organisation of the tribal peoples.

[366] x. 11. 8.
[367] See Macdonell & Keith VI ii. 426n.
[368] viii. 4.9.
[369] x. 71. 10.
[370] VI ii. 426n.
[371] *Ib.* ii. 427 for Hillebrandt's view of *su-jata.*

It may be mentioned here that Macdonell and Keith, with all their support for Ludwig's view — and with what consistency it is not easy to judge — at the same time claimed that both the *sabha* and the *samiti* were the assemblies of the Vedic tribes. Here are some of their observations:

> *Sabha* is the name of an 'assembly' of the Vedic Indians as well as of the 'hall' where they met in assembly.[372]
>
> Hillebrandt seems right in maintaining that the *sabha* and the *samiti* cannot be distinguished.[373]
>
> *Samiti* denotes an 'assembly' of the Vedic tribe. It is already mentioned in the *Rig Veda* and often later and sometimes in connection with *sabha*.[374]

If all this be true then we have hardly any ground to view the *sabha* and the *samiti* as the exclusive assembly of the aristocrats — of the Brahmanas and the rich patrons. If Macdonell and Keith did not see the incompatibility of the two, the reason presumably is their neglect of the comparative method.

We may now try to understand *sabha* and *samiti* from what is generally known about the tribal assemblies. We begin with a crucial evidence.

> The place where the herbs (*osadhih*) assemble together as the kings in an assembly (*rajanah samitau iva*) — there the wise (*viprah*) is called the healer (*bhisak*), the destroyer of evils and diseases.[375]

The poet speaks here of herbs and healer. The reference to the *samiti* is only incidental, by way of a metaphor. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the importance of the usage. The significant thing is the use of the plural: *rajanah samitau iva* (as the kings assemble in the *samiti*). Evidently, the kings could not be monarchs in our sense because a plurality of them gathering in assembly makes hardly any sense. And if they were not monarchs they could only be the war-chiefs. And if they were the war-chiefs, their *samiti* could only be the tribal council of the chiefs, the most important function of which, as we have just seen, was to conduct the tribal war.

We may now understand why the *Nighantu*[376] mentioned this word as one of the synonyms for war: the *samiti*, according to it, was one of the *samgrama-namani*. Being the assembly of the war-chiefs, its main concern was war: the tribal assembly of the chiefs, in short, meant war. This is the sense in which Sayana, too, most frequently interpreted the word.

372 *Ib.* ii. 426.
373 *Ib.* ii. 427.
374 *Ib.* ii. 430.
375 *RV* x. 97. 6.
376 ii. 17.

We shall presently see that the intrinsic logic of the development of the pastoral economy gradually made warfare a primary occupation of the Vedic people. Perhaps this alone can explain why the word *samiti* acquired a special importance in the later portions of the Vedic literatures. With the development of the predominantly marauding career, the Vedic poets became increasingly concerned with the *samiti* which explains why the word *samiti* is mentioned particularly in the tenth book of the *Rig Veda*. This peculiarity is noted by our modern scholars, though the interpretation offered fails to convince. We quote Jayaswal:[377]

> It is noticeable that the references to the *samiti* in the *Rig Veda* are to be found only in portions which are considered to be the latest. We may, therefore, conclude that the *samiti* was a product of the developed, not early Vedic age. The developed stage of debate, evidently a free right of discussion, the anxiety of the debator to win over the opinion of others, all point to a culture of considerable degree.

What is clearly overlooked, however, is that the *Rig Veda* itself, even in its most archaic stratum, contained references to popular assemblies, speeches and debates. Popular assembly as well as the speakers' eloquence may be as old as the tribal society.

The *Rig Veda* has other words for assemblies, two of which are particularly prominent: *sabha* and *vidatha*. The scholars who have tended to overlook the possible distinction between *sabha* and *samiti* were mistaken: both meant assembly no doubt, but the former might have stood for the clan council while the latter the tribal council of the war chiefs.

Evidently, the tribal chiefs, apart from attending their own war council also attended the clan council: 'The king went to the *sabha* just as much as to the *samiti*.'[378] But the 'king' here may create some confusion. The commonest word in the *Rig Veda* for the war chief was *raja*, which later on came to mean 'king.' The camparatively modern meaning of the word has led some of our scholars to discover kings and monarchs in the *Rig Veda*, which in turn led them to assume that some kind of peculiarly democratic monarchy existed in the Vedic age. That the *rajas* of the *Rig Veda* could not have been the kings of the later times is decisively proved by the fact that they were, like the chiefs of tribal society, definitely *elected by the people*.

377 HP i. 13.
378 Macdonell & Keith VI ii. 427n.

The clearest reference to the *raja* being elected by the people is to be found in the *Atharva Veda*:

> *Thee let the people choose unto kingship*, thee these five divine directions; rest at the summit of royalty, at the pinnacle; from thence, formidable, *share out good things to us*.[379]

The hyperboles of the Vedic poets appear to be all the more exaggerated by the modern translator's preoccupations with the later ideas. Beneath all these overgrowths, however, the tribal custom of the people electing the chief and the chief in turn sharing out the wealth among the people, are evident enough. This point, if ignored, may lead even the greatest of scholars to grave inconsistencies. Here is an example from the *The Cambridge History of India*:

> So far, our sources of knowledge, if imperfect, have given us material sufficient to sketch the main outline of Vedic society. Unhappily, when we turn to consider more closely the details of the political organisation proper, the evidence becomes painfully scanty and inadequate.[380]

Interestingly, however, when it comes to the question of denying the truly tribal organisation of the Vedic people, the same 'painfully scanty and inadequate' evidences may lead the historian to definite claims:

> The tribes of the *Rig Veda* were certainly under kingly rule: there is no passage in the *Rig Veda* which suggests any other form of government, while the king under the style *rajan* is a frequent figure. This is only what might be expected in a community which was not merely patriarchal... but also engaged in constant warfare against both Aryan and aboriginal foes. Moreover, the kingship was normally hereditary: even in the scantly notices of the *Rig Veda* we can trace lines of succession such as that of Vadhryasva, Divodasa, Pijavana and Sudas, or Durgaha, Giriksit, Purukutsa, and Trasadasyu, or Mitratithi, Kurusravana, and Upamasravas.[381]

The list of names is certainly imposing and there is no doubt that at least in some cases the genealogy was actually indicated by the *Rig Veda*. Thus, for example, Trasadasyu actually appears to have been the sun of Purukutsa and the father of Purukutsa may have had the name Durgaha.[382] However, even such genealogies are not free from confusion. Thus, the son of Trasadasyu was once mentioned as Triksi while in another place as Kurusravana.[383] Of course, there is nothing unusual about the

[379] iii. 4. 2. tr. Whitney. Cf. Keith RPV 481: 'The ceremony of the Rajasuya, or royal consecration, hints at recollections of an elective kingship by the consent of th people.'

[380] CHI i. 94.

[381] *Ib.*

[382] viii. 19. 36; iv. 42. 8-9.

[383] viii. 22. 7; x. 33. 4.

same person having two sons bearing these two names; what appears to be unlikely, however, is that both of them were the hereditary *kings of the Vedic tribes*. Besides, whether any of them was a hereditary king in our sense is quite doubtful. Even Sayana said that Trasadasyu, son of Purukutsa, was only a *risi*,[384] a sage or poet. Similarly, the name Kurusravana, as interpreted by him, meant priest (*ritvik*) of the Kurus,[385] a interpretation evidently accepted by Wilson, who rendered the name as 'the bearer of the praises of the Kurus.' In another *rik*,[386] however, the epithet *raja* was attributed to the same person, leading Sayana to make a king-name out of it. But the manner in which he did it is clearly artificial: '*kurusravana* meant priest of the Kurus; one who listened to their praises was a king of that name.' The fact, however, could have been simpler: the word *raja* might have been a more ennobling epithet in the *rik*.

These are only a few of the difficulties involved in a straightforward acceptance of the genealogies mentioned. Further, the mere mention of the genealogy is no valid evidence of hereditary kingship, particularly in view of the reference in the *Atharva Veda* to the election of the *raja* by the people as also the simile in the *Rig Veda* of a multiplicity of such *rajas* assembling in the *samiti*. Of course, as we shall presently see, towards the beginning of the disintegration of the tribal organisation, it became customary to elect the chiefs from the same family; this customary election of successors from the same family, with the final breakdown of the tribal organisation, is transformed into hereditary succession. Thus the genealogies mentioned can at best indicate that in passages of the *Rig Veda* we have indications of the breakdown of the tribal society of the Vedic people. There is nothing strange in this. What is significant, however, is that when we go back to the really archaic stratum of the *Rig Veda* we come across such evidences as make the hypothesis of the hereditary kingship among the Vedic tribes all the more implausible. We mention only one here.

In the list of the so-called hereditary kings, we come across the name Upamasravas. The latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*[387] mentioned him as the son of Mitratithi (though not of Kurusravana, as in the genealogy quoted). There is nothing however in these references to suggest that he was a hereditary king. On

384 on *RV* viii. 8. 21. 385 on *RV* x. 32. 9.
386 x. 33. 4. 387 x. 33. 6-7.

the contrary, the oldest stratum of the *Rig Veda*,[388] we come across the interesting word '*upamasravastamam*' and even Sayana could not make a king name of it. It was clearly a hyperbolic epithet for Brahmanaspati, invoked as the chief of the *gana*, and meaning 'abounding in food beyond comparison.' Thus, even if it can be objectively demonstrated that hereditary succession of chiefs — even of kingship — did develop towards the end of the Rig Vedic period, it will prove nothing whatsoever as to the period as a whole. On the other hand, the evidences of the clan council and the tribal assemblies in the *Rig Veda*, being less doubtful and sometimes overwhelmingly obvious, go to show that the Vedic people were largely at the tribal stage in which there is no place for anything like hereditary kingship. In fact, the political organisation of the Vedic tribes will ever remain a mystery if the indications about it in the *Rig Veda* are not understood in the light of tribal constitution in general.

This introduces us to the main point missed by the contributor to the *Cambridge History of India*: he wanted to discuss the 'political organisation' of the Vedic tribes and yet to ignore the question of tribal organisation in general. The point is simple: hereditary kingship and the truly tribal organisation are not compatible.

Evidently, the scholars who have discovered 'monarchy' among the Vedic tribes are misled by the word *rajan* of the *Rig Veda*. This is clear from the way the *Vedic Age* had echoed the *Cambridge History*: 'As a general rule, monarchy was the system of government prevailing in this age. The term *rajan*, king or chieftain, is of frequent occurrence in the *Rig Veda*.' [389] The premise is true but the conclusion untenable: the word *rajan* is there in the *Rik Veda* but it does not prove the existence of a monarchical form of government. We shall mention here two decisive evidences. Even in the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*[390] we come across the epithet *raja vraatasya*, and this as a synonym for *ganasya senanih*. This means nothing but the tribal chief. Secondly, one of the famous battles was referred by the *Rig Veda* as *dasarajna*; under the set idea that *raja* could mean nothing but the king, this is taken to mean *the battle of the ten kings*.[391] But who were the ten 'kings'? In preparing the list of these so-called kings, even the author of the *Cambridge*

[388] ii. 23. 1.
[389] VA 352.
[390] x. 34. 12.
[391] CHI i. 81; VA 245. The nex quotation is from CHI i. 82.

History was frankly obliged to use the word 'tribe' instead: 'Of the ten tribes five are of little note, the Alinas,... the Pakthas, the Bhalanases, ... the Sivas, ... and the Visanins. Better known in the *Rig Veda* are the other five, the Anus, ... the Bhrigus, the Druhyus, ... the Turvasas and Yadus, ... and the Purus.' If these were tribes, then the battle against them could not be a battle of the 'ten kings.' And if this were so the use of the word *rajan* in the *Rig Veda* is far from being a sure proof of hereditary monarchy.

'Women did not go to the *sabha* for they were of course excluded from the political activity.'[392] This would have been most logical in the highly patriarchal society which the Vedic people developed. The *Maitrayani Samhita*[393] did in fact declare: 'Woman is weak, man is strong; hence men go to the assembly (*sabha*), not women.' But this text was much later than the *Rig Veda* and the *Rig Veda* itself was a vast compilation of songs composed over a very long period of time. Therefore, the possibility of finding in it the relics of the older days when even the women were going to the assemblies is not ruled out. In any case, we come across the interesting word *sabhavati*, a female in the assembly, though occurring only once in the *Rig Veda*: 'a woman in the assembly speaks words fit for the assembly.'[394] Again, in a somewhat obscure *rik*, a reference was made to three truthful women going to the assembly thrice a day.[395]

'There is,' said Macdonell and Keith,[396] 'not a single notice of the work done by the *sabha*.' This, again, is not absolutely correct. We have in the *Rig Veda* references to the speeches made in the *sabha*.[397] Further, if Jayaswal's[398] interpretation is correct, we have also references to the election of the 'king' by the people,[399] and if the people did elect their chiefs, it could have taken place in their assemblies.

These are, it will be objected, at best conjectural. However, when we pass on to discuss the references to the Vedic assembly by the other word, *vidatha*, we have the feeling of moving on more secure grounds. The functions of the *vidatha* were obviously multifarious. We have already noticed one of these,

[392] Macdonell & Keith VI ii. 427.
[393] iv. 7. 4.
[394] i. 167. 3.
[395] iii. 56. 5.
[396] VI. ii. 427.
[397] vi. 28. 6.
[398] HP i. 14.
[399] x. 173. 1-5. cf. *AV* vi. 87; vi. 88 1-2.

namely the division of wealth, which must have been a very ancient practice. That there were debates and discussions in the *vidatha* is certain; the desire for eloquence in the assembly was frequently expressed: 'O Indra, we are your eternal beloveds and great heroes; we speak in the assembly (*vidatham a vadema*[400]).' 'May we speak loud in the assembly, rich in valiant men (*brihat vadema vidathe suvirah*[401]).' This ran like a refrain and occurred no less than twenty-two times in the second book of the *Rig Veda*,[402] admittedly part of its oldest stratum. We may understand the significance of this if we remember that in the tribal society eloquence in the council is one of the criteria on the basis of which the chiefs are elected.[403]

Other functions of the *vidatha* included solving tribal disputes and punishing those who violated the tribal laws.[404] There are also clear references to evolving the tribal wisdom or the courses of action (*dhibhih*) in the *vidatha*.[405] In fact, of the three words meaning assembly in the *Rig Veda*, *vidatha* is the most frequently used. The varied activities conducted in the *vidatha* can be inferred from the varied meanings that modern scholars have attributed to this word. The following is from Macdonell and Keith:[406]

> *Vidatha* is a word of obscure sense, confined mainly to the *Rig Veda*. According to Roth, the sense is primarily 'order', then the concrete body which gives orders, then 'assembly' for secular or religious ends, or for war... Ludwig thinks that the root idea is an 'assembly', specially of the Maghavans and the Brahmanas. Geldner considers that the word primarily means knowledge.

Monier-Williams[407] has given the following meanings of the word:

> Knowledge, wisdom (esp.) 'knowledge given to others', i.e., instruction, direction, order, arrangement, disposition, rule, command; a meeting, assembly (either for deliberating or for the observance of festive or religious rites, etc.) council, community, association, congregation....

However, Whitney's[408] seems the most logical rendering of the word. He renders it as 'the council.' The other meanings, attributed to the same word by other scholars, are presumably

[400] ii. 12. 15. Cf *AV* ii. 27 for charm against opponents in debate.
[401] ii. 1. 16. etc. (tr.) after Oldenberg See JAOS xix. 15.
[402] See Bloomfield VC.
[403] Morgan AS 71.
[404] i. 31. 6; vii. 93. 5.
[405] iii. 38. 5.
[406] VI ii. 296.
[407] SED 963.
[408] AV i. 15.

the result of the circumstance that in the different contexts of the *Rig Veda* different functions of the council or the assembly were referred to; modern scholars, in interpreting this archaic word, have often concentrated more on these functions than on the assembly itself that carried these out. In tribal society, the highest wisdom and the highest knowledge – like the rule or the order or the disposition – are evolved only in the council, and the word *vidatha* itself might have been a witness to this.

Bloomfield[409] is probably the only modern scholar who has strongly challenged this interpretation of the word. According to him, *vidatha* could never have meant the council or the assembly; it really meant the household. But his view appears to be based neither on any unquestionable evidence nor on very sound arguments. The evidence on which he relies most is the reference in the *Rig Veda* to women going to the *vidatha*: women were excluded from the political activities of the Vedic people and still they were not excluded from the *vidatha;* as such it could only mean the household. But there are clear references to the 'king' sitting in the *vidatha*: *vidathyah samrat,*[410] which, like the references to eloquence in the *vidatha,* or to the division of wealth in the *vidatha,* hardly makes any sense if it is taken to mean the household. To suit his particular thesis, Bloomfield had to take recourse to forced and fanciful interpretations of these references. Lastly, the evidence of women going to the *vidatha,* on which Bloomfield has depended so much, may, as we have already suggested, indicate some older realities of the Vedic society. And if this is so, we are led to accept the older view which identifies the *vidatha* with the *sabha,*[411] though with this reservation, that the *vidatha* was possibly an older word than the *sabha,* and as such it could have reflected even older realities about the Vedic society. This seems to be corroborated not only by repeated references to the division of wealth taking place in the *vidatha,* but also by the gods themselves as having their own *vidatha.* Agni takes the *havi* from 'our' *vidatha* to that of the gods; he is the messenger between the two.[412]

But the strongest evidence against Bloomfield's view is the total disappearance of the *vidatha,* along with the *sabha* and the *samiti,* in the orthodox tradition of the post-Vedic period.

[409] JAOS xix. 11ff.
[410] iv. 21. 2.
[411] JAOS xix. 13.
[412] viii. 39. 1.

This cannot at all be explained on the assumption that the *vidatha* meant the home or the household, for there is nothing to make us imagine that in the post-Vedic period the champions of the Vedic tradition became homeless. On the other hand, if *vidatha* meant the council or the assembly, it is only logical to expect that in the post-Vedic period its importance should wither away, for even during the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda* itself, the development of inter-tribal wars led to the disintegration of the tribal organisation of the Vedic people. We shall presently see how the *vidatha* withered away in the post-Vedic period. However, it may be useful to begin with what is known in general about the disintegration of the tribal assembly.

We quote Engels:[413]

The military commander of the people—*rex, basileus, thiudans*—became an indispensable and permanent official. The popular assembly was instituted wherever it did not yet exist. The military commander, the council and the popular assembly formed the organs of the military democracy into which gentile society had developed. A military democracy—because war and organisation for war were now regular functions of the life of the people. The wealth of their neighbours excited the greed of the peoples who began to regard the acquisition of wealth as one of the main purposes in life. They were barbarians: plunder appeared to them easier and even more honourable than productive work. War, once waged simply to avenge aggression or as a means of enlarging territory that had become inadequate, was now waged for the sake of plunder alone, and became a regular profession. It was not for nothing that formidable walls were reared around the new fortified towns: their yawning moats were the graves of the gentile constitution and their turrets already reached up into civilization. Internal affairs underwent a similar change. The robber wars increased the power of the supreme military commander as well as of the sub-commanders. The customary election of successors from one family, especially after the introduction of father-right, was gradually transformed into hereditary succession, first tolerated, then claimed and finally usurped. The foundation of hereditary royalty and hereditary nobility was laid. In this manner the organs of the gentile constitution were gradually torn from their roots in the people, in gens, phratry and tribe and the whole gentile order was transformed into its opposite: from an organisation of tribes for the free administration of their own affairs it became an organisation for plundering and oppressing their neighbours; and correspondingly, its organs were transformed from instruments of the will of the people into independent organs for ruling and oppressing their own people. This could not have happened had not the greed for wealth divided the members of the gentes into rich and poor; had not 'property differences in a gens changed the community of interest into antagonism between members of a gens' (Marx); and had not the growth of

[413] OF 267-9.

slavery already begun to brand working for a living as slavish and more ingnominous than engaging in plunder.

We have here all the clues to the development of the Vedic society from the later portions of the *Rig Veda* onwards. In the latest portions of the *Rig Veda* the word *samiti*, which according to the *Nighantu* meant war, came into prominence and all the truth in the list of the 'hereditary kings' in the *Cambridge History of India* could have been nothing more than the fact that already towards the end of the Rig Vedic period the 'customary election of successors from one family' was in the process of getting 'transformed into hereditary succession, first tolerated, then claimed and finally usurped.' We shall later see some more aspects of this transformation or the breakdown of the tribal organisation: the individual interest trampling upon that of the community, the fall of Varuna along with his simple moral grandeur and the growth of the new values like greed and power. For the present let us confine ourselves to the question of the assemblies.

If the importance of the *samiti* in the latest portions of the *Rig Veda* was indicative of the development of military democracy, it also foreshadowed the death of tribal democracy: the robber-wars increased not only the wealth of the tribesmen but also the greed for wealth of the individuals who constituted the tribe, and thus ultimately divided the community against itself. The way in which the society was disintegrating can possibly be inferred from the desperate calls to preserve unity, which began to be quite obvious from the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda* and were, interestingly enough, often accompanied by an appeal to the memory of the past. We have already quoted the last *sukta* of the *Rig Veda*, which formed part of its latest stratum: 'Do ye concur, be ye closely combined; let your minds be concurrent, as the gods of old sat concurrent about their portions.' Such a desperate call for unity should have found no place here if the unity or the group-bond of the tribesmen had continued to be a reality. Evidently, the Vedic society was beginning to break up. And the *Atharva Veda*—which, with all its archaic elements, was, as a compilation, much later than the *Rig Veda*—naturally contained many charms and spells to ensure unity among the kinsmen themselves. Here are some examples:

May your bodies be united, may your minds and your purposes

(be united)! Brahmanaspati here has brought you together, Bhaga has brought you together.

Harmony of mind (I procure) for you, and also harmony of heart. Moreover with the aid of Bhaga's exertions do I cause you to agree. As the Adityas are united with the Vasus, as the fierce (Rudras), free from grudge, with the Maruts, thus, O three-named (Agni), without grudge, do thou render these people here of the same mind![414]

May we be in harmony with our kinfolk, in harmony with strangers; do ye, O Asvins, establish here agreement among us! May we agree in mind and thought, may we not struggle with one another, in a spirit displeasing to the gods! May not the din of frequent battle-carnage arise, may the arrow not fly when the day of Indra has arrived.[415]

Hither shall come Varuna, Soma, Agni; Brihaspati with the Vasus shall come hither! Come together, O ye kinsmen all, of one mind, to the glory of this mighty guardian. The fire that is within your souls, the scheme that hath entered your minds, do I frustrate with my oblation, with my *ghee*: delight in me shall ye take, O kinsmen. Remain right here, go not away from us; (the roads) at a distance Pusan shall make impassable for you! Vastospati shall urgently call you back; delight in me shall ye take, O kinsmen![416]

This is of course only one side of the picture. The other side, as is only to be expected, was characterised by an equally desperate — almost uncanny — desire of the individual to bring the community under his control and submission. Here are the spells to ensure this:

With my mind do I seize your minds; do ye with your thoughts follow my thought! I place your hearts in my control: come ye, directing your way after my course!

I have called upon heaven and earth, I have called upon the goddess Sarasvati, I have called upon both Indra and Agni: may we succeed in this, O Sarasvati.[417]

'The key-note of this charm,' said Bloomfield,[418] 'is the word *sam-nam*, "to bend to one's will" ... In the Atharvan the hyman (iv. 39) is the most elaborate production of this sort.' And this is how it reads in Whitney's[419] translation:

Earth (is) milch-cow; of her Agni (is) calf; let her, with Agni as calf, milk for me food, refreshment, (my) desire, life-time first, progeny, prosperity, wealth: hail!.... The atmosphere is milch-cow; of her Vayus is calf; let her, with Vayu as calf, milk for me, etc. etc.

This is obviously far from the collective desire and the inviolable law of division that inspired the earlier poets of the *Rig*

414 *AV* vi. 74. 1-3. (tr.) Bloomfield.
415 *AV* vii. 52. 1-2
416 *AV* iv. 73. 1-3.
417 *AV* vi. 94. 2-3.
418 SBE xlii. 508.
419 AV i. 216.

Veda: the interest as well as the will of the individual have already undermined those of the community. As is only to be expected, under this new set-up the old administrative machinery of the collective society passed into its opposite: in the post-Rig Vedic period the glory of the ancient *vidatha* vanished fast and the *sabha* and *samiti* became merely the forum for the expression of the individual will:

> May *sabha* and *samiti*, the two daughters of Prajapati, concurrently aid me! May he with whom I shall meet co-operate with me; may I, O ye fathers, speak agreeably to those assembled!
>
> We know thy name, O assembly: 'mirth,' verily, is the name: may all those that sit assembled in thee utter speech in harmony with me! Of them that are sitting together I take to myself the power and the understanding: in this entire gathering render, O Indra, me successful!
>
> If your mind has wandered to a distance, or has been enchained here or there, then do we turn it hither: may your mind take delight in me![420]

The *samiti* is called here by the name 'mirth.' It may be that the assembly was once also the scene of tribal festivities; but in view of the total usurpation of its former autonomy by the individual, there is really no reason to believe that it continued to be so. In the *Upanisads*,[421] the *samiti* had been fully transformed into the royal court, attended by the king's flatterers—*rajanya-bandhu*.[422] It was in royal courts like these that the kings of the days of the *Upanisads*, relieved of the responsibilities of material production and surrounded by their parasitical flatterers, evolved the original germs of the idealistic speculations in Indian philosophy. But more of this later.

If in the *Upanisads*, there remained at least the word *samiti*,—though merely as an empty husk of its former self,—we find it disappear altogether in the later law-codes and other works of the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition. 'The assembly disappears as an effective part of government in the Buddhist texts, the Epic and the Law Books.'[423] An obvious reservation is to be added to this. For we have already seen the glory of the assembly in the Buddhist texts. However, the statement is fully correct so far as the Epic and the Law Books are concerned. And Hopkins is probably the only modern scholar who has rightly traced

[420] *AV* vii. 12. 1-1.
[421] *Br. Up.* vi. 2; *Ch. Up.* v.3.
[422] *Ch. Up.* v. 3. 5. It is to be noted that this word had a distinctly derogatory sense.
[423] Macdonell & Keith VI ii. 431.

the decay of the old assembly through the aristocratic war-councils and the secret priestly conclave. According to him, this decay is complete in the Epic, though there are records of the different stages of this decay in the Epic itself:

The earliest assembly for adjusting political affairs in Aryan India was the clan-assembly, called *sabha* (cf. the German *Sippe*). . . . In the Epic we find the *sabha* to be an assembly of any sort. . . In such a case as that mentioned above, where the people met 'in assemblies' to discuss political matters, we may perhaps see a trace of the original function of the people's assembly, though such a meeting had, of course, long since ceased to be what the *sabha* had been—a village assembly for counsel—and corresponds neither to the regular *sabha* of old nor to the antique state council in which the king took part (*samiti*), the latter having now become a meeting of the nobles and king. . . . The heroes of the *Mahabharata* are not what they (by later interpolations) are exhorted to be. They act from their own wishes. . . . The council is military. The meaning is clear. The assembly of the people had become an assembly of nobles. The military power of the people had quite become the possession of the king. In all public matters appertaining to the story itself, the priests are as good as silent, and the people are suppressed. It is only in such older legends as are related above, and told in our story as 'ancient tales', that the power of the people seems to linger, and then not in military but in civil matters. . . . We have thus three diplomatic stages reflected in our poem: the popular assembly, already restricted to protestation in civil matters; the public aristocratic assembly on war matters; the private priestly council on all matters.[424]

10 Yajna : The Ritual of Production

This is how Macdonell[425] summed up the transition from the old *Vedas* to the *Brahmanas*, the ritual books which succeeded them:

The creative period of the *Vedas* at length came to an end. It was followed by an epoch in which there no longer seemed any need to offer up new prayers to the gods, but it appeared more meritorious to repeat those made by the holy seers of bygone generations, and handed down from father to son in various priestly families. The old hymns thus came to be successfully gathered together in the Vedic collections already mentioned, and in this form acquired an ever-increasing sanctity. Having ceased to produce poetry, the priesthood transferred their creative energies to the elaboration of the sacrificial ceremonial. The result was a ritual system far surpassing in complexity of detail anything the world has elsewhere known. The main importance of the old Vedic hymns and formulae now came to be their application to the innumerable details of the sacrifice. Around this combination of sacred verse and rite a new body of doctrine grew up in sacerdotal tradition, and finally assumed definite shape in the guise of distinct theological treatises entitled

[424] JAOS xiii. 148-51. [425] HSL 31-2.

Brahmanas.... They evidently did not come into being till a time when the hymns were already deemed ancient and sacred revelations, the priestly custodians of which no longer fully understood their meaning owing to the change undergone by the language. They are written in prose throughout.... Yet as the oldest treatises on ritual practices extant in any literature, they are of great interest to the student of the history of religions in general, besides furnishing much important material to the student of Indian antiquity in particular.

We have already reviewed some specimens of the literary compositions of the Vedic people during the period of their 'creativity.' These were poems and songs throbbing with the memory of the collective life and inspired by the intense desire for the this-worldly objects – food, wealth, progeny and safety. Even the gods themselves were but the incarnations of such desires and, like the mortals in whose image they were made, were sitting together in the assemblies to receive their *shares* of the collective wealth. In short, the society in which these poets lived and sang was yet to be fully split up into antagonistic classes and their consciousness was yet to witness the birth of the strictly spiritualistic values.

We may now ask ourselves: What were the distinctive features of the Vedic society during the succeeding period of barren ritualism? Answered Macdonell: [426]

The period of the *Brahmanas* is a very important one in the history of Indian society. For in it the system of the four castes assumed definite shape, furnishing the frame within which the highly complex network of the castes of today has been developed. In that system the priesthood, who even in the first Vedic period had occupied an influential position, secured for themselves the dominant power which they have maintained ever since.... While in other early societies the chief power remained in the hands of princes and warrior nobles, the domination of the priesthood became possible in India as soon as the energetic life of conquest during the early Vedic times in the north-west was followed by a period of physical inactivity or indolence in the plains. Such altered conditions enabled the cultured class, who alone held the secret of the all-powerful sacrifice, to gain the supremacy of intellect over physical force.

There are certain obvious reservations to be added to this. It is true that the strictly post-Vedic period, the beginnings of which is to be traced to the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*, witnessed the rise of the four castes in which the priests or the Brahmanas constituted the most dominant section. But it is not true that they had occupied an influential position from the first Vedic period, for it is extremely doubtful whether during these

[426] *Ib.* 33-4.

early days any distinct priest-class had at all emerged. Besides, it is not wholly true that during the period of the *Brahmanas* the class of princes and warrior nobles receded to the background leaving power in the hands of the priests. As we are going to see, the superiority of the priests was based on a clear compromise with the warrior nobles, and this was effected only after prolonged scrambling for power between the two classes. Secondly, if the literatures of this period are evidences of 'physical inactivity and indolence,' which they certainly are, they must be considered as the characteristics of the ruling classes, and the causes of these are certainly not to be sought in the geographical factors like the shift from the north-west to the plains but rather in the economic factor, – the increased productivity of the Vedic people which, by creating surplus, created the objective possibility for the few to live on the labour of the many. Thirdly, there was not any real 'superiority of intellect over physical force'; rather, during the period of the *Brahmanas* physical force or violence acquired a new momentum, as it were, and this for the purpose of maintaining the newly emerged state-power. What was actually established was the superiority of mental labour over material labour, of thought over action, though it was only in the latest appendices of the *Brahmanas*, namely the *Upanisads*, that this superiority assumed its final form. The clue to all these, again, was the emergence of the leisured class: 'the more modest productions of the working hand retreated into the background, the more so since the mind that planned the labour process... was able to have this planned labour carried out by other hands than its own.' In short, the disintegration of the ancient tribal organisation was complete. How this resulted in the birth of the idealistic outlook of the *Upanisads* needs to be studied next. But we shall confine ourselves here only to one question: What was the effect of this disintegration of the tribal organisation on the Vedic rituals, the *yajnas*?

It was claimed in the *Brahmanas* that all the literary compositions compiled in the earlier *Vedas* were meant to be specifically applied or used (*viniyoga*) in some ritual – *yajna*. This claim was not entirely fictitious, because there is no reason to believe that the early ancestors of the Vedic people differed fundamentally from the primitive peoples surviving today. They had no fascination for pure poetry or songs. We have already discussed in Chapter II that the only poetry the primitive people

possess are songs which are invariably magical, and the core of which is desire. It is therefore only logical to assume that the earliest poetry of the Vedic people, too, was also magical and as such was likely to have been accompanied by some ritual or other. Thus we can infer that this was all the truth behind the claim of the *Brahmanas,* viz. the Vedic verses had definite ritual use.

But this does in no way imply that the verses were originally employed in the rituals in the specific sense of the *Brahmanas.* The reason is simple. There is nothing in the earlier portions of the *Vedas* to indicate that the early Vedic people were at all acquainted with the rituals in the specific sense in which these were explained in the *Brahmanas.* Rituals of later times were but malignant after-growths — a point that will not be questioned by any serious scholar today. At the same time, they could not have been the inventions of later priests *ad novo.* However much elaborated these might have been and whatever might have been the new content and form acquired by these rituals in the later liturgy, it is possible for us to see primitive magic as forming the subsoil of the later Vedic *yajna.*

There is probably nothing new about this point. It is already argued by competent scholars that the Vedic *yajna* was the outgrowth of primitive magic, 'that the Brahman was the first of priests, originally a magician, and that the spell is the primitive form whence prayer has emerged, as from the magician the priest has evolved with the growth of religion.'[427] This is, however, not the whole truth. The limitation of the view as advocated arises from a lack of materialistic understanding of primitive magic itself. We have already seen in Chapter II that the practice of magic is not entirely futile: it is an illusory technique supplementing the real technique and the efficacy of this illusory technique depends upon the collectivity of primitive existence. In other words, so long as group-life does not disintegrate, the magical ritual remains vitally related to the technique of production itself. In fact, the poorer the development of the productive technique the more abject is its dependence on the magical ritual: by representing the desired reality as already present, it leads to overcome the felt-helplessness in the face of hostile nature and the more undeveloped is the actual technique the more acute is this sense of felt-helplessness, i.e.,

[427] The view of Henry. See summary Keith RPV 399.

the greater the need of magical ritual. The development of the productive technique brings nature increasingly under human control and as such the original economic efficacy of magic withers away. But not so the rites. They survive, though in new form and to serve a new purpose. For the same development of the productive forces ultimately divide the community against itself and the 'technique of magic is developed by the ruling class as a means of consolidating their privileges by investing them with supernatural sanctions.'[428] This, in fact, is the form in which we find the Vedic *yajnas* of the later period: the rituals, originally aspects of the productive technique, were transformed into sacrifices performed for maintaining the power and increasing the prosperity of the privileged classes. And the ancient spells were proclaimed to be weapons of the ruling classes. Manu[429] said that the magic spells of the *Atharva Veda* were the weapons of the Brahmanas which they would use without hesitation against their foes. This was an extension of the claim that began to be formulated as early as the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*:[430] viz. the magical power of *tapas* (lit., heat, but including other forms of self-mortification like fasting, silence, etc. conceived as means of attaining super-human power), the exclusive possession of the Brahmanas, will bring calamity to the man who injures them. Thus the primitive magician had already become the priest, and the ancient magical power was transformed into an instrument of his class-domination.

However, what interests us here is the prehistory of the Vedic *yajna*. In discussing this we may begin with the indications of its original connections with the collective mode of the productive technique.[431]

Yajna, as understood later and elaborately explained in the *Brahmanas*, was the performance of the ritual by the priests, — usually a number of them, — not for the benefit of themselves but for that of some rich individual, the *yajamana*, who paid

[428] Thomson R 9.
[429] xi. 33
[430] x. 109. 4.
[431] Dange (IPCS 32ff.). I think, is the first to suggest that *yajna* was originally the collective mode of production of the early Vedic people. The amendment I have proposed here is that *yajna* was more strictly the ritual aspect thereof: the collective labour of the primitive people remains inextricably mixed up with magical rituals and these rituals, eventually separated from the labour process itself, assumed the malignant form of the Vedic *yajnas* as later understood.

for it. Accordingly, Monier-Williams[432] gave the following meanings of the word *yajamana*: 'the person paying the cost of a sacrifice, the institutor of a sacrifice (who, to perform it, employs a priest or priests, who are often hereditary functionaries in a family), any patron, host, rich man, head of a family or tribe.' We may, however, safely leave the 'head of the tribe' out of consideration for the truly tribal society cannot have a 'head' in the sense of a rich patron. With this reservation, the meanings given by Monier-Williams give a realistic picture of the *yajamana* as we know him in the later literatures: he pays the cost of the *yajna* but does not himself participate in the performance, excepting in so far as he sits there (sometimes with his wife) to derive the results of the ritual.

Interestingly, however, the etymology of the word *yajamana* is itself an evidence against such a picture. The word is derived from the root *yaj*, with suffix *sanac*. What is specially important is this suffix: according to the grammatical rule[433] it applies only when the performer of the act is himself the enjoyer of its fruit, i.e., when the person is deriving the benefit of an action performed by himself. Thus the etymology of the word indicates its prehistory when the distinction between the patron and the paid priests did not emerge. Presumably, the *yajamanas* were then themselves the performers of the *yajna*.

Are there any indications in the *Rig Veda* to confirm this etymological evidence? There are, as a matter of fact, many; we may mention only a few.

That which invariably inspired a Vedic song was a desire. We have already seen that, at least in an overwhelmingly large number of passages, these desires had a pronounced collective bias and even Sayana was obliged to interpret the 'we' of the songs as the *yajamans* in the plural. This feature by itself precludes the possibility of the songs being originally employed for the benefit of the individual patron, i.e., the *yajamana* as later understood.

'There is,' said Bloomfield,[434] 'always one *yajamana*, or bestower of the sacrifice; the sacrifice redounds to his benefit, and that of his family.' This is true so far as the later picture of the *yajamana* goes; but it does not always fit in with the Rig Vedic evidences. For we have not only the clearest indication in the *Rig Veda* of a collective body of *yajamanas* but also of

432 SED 839.

433 *PS* i. 3. 72.

434 JAOS xix. 13.

the more startling fact that they were the same as the common tribesmen. Here is a crucial evidence:

We, the *yajamanas,* with favourable *mantras* (spells), invoke you (Agni), who art the best of the laudable, the foremost of the Angirases, the wise one, with blazing hair, going round like the sun, one who fulfils the desires of the people (*visah*) and of the *carsanis.*[435]

There can be no doubt that the *yajamanas* and the people were identical in this *rik.* Even Sayana had to admit this. He interpreted *visah* as the *yajamana-rupa-prajah,* people in the form of *yajamanas.* Equally interesting is his note on *carsaninam*: 'of the men, i.e., of the *yajamanas,* or of the *carsanis,* who previously being men later attained the status of the gods by dint of *yajnas,* and thus became fit to invoke the gods.' At least one point is clear: the *yajamana* was yet to be raised to the figure of the individual patron instituting a sacrifice for his personal benefit.

Here are some more *riks* in which the word *yajamana* was in the plural and, presumably, in the sense of the common people desiring material wealth:

O Agni, the *yajamanas* daily hold towards you all the best wealth — along with you, desiring wealth, the intelligent people opened wide the stall full of cows.[436]

The gods and the *yajamanas,* the protectors of the wind, ask for the goddess Sraddha (Reverence); calling her with intense longing, they gain wealth through Sraddha.[437]

(O Indra), the wish-yielder, let not the other *yajamanas* delight your two horses with smooth backs; always approach us bypassing them, — we shall satisfy you with filtered *soma.*[438]

O Indra, drink this food that intoxicates and release these two moving horses of yours at this place; let not the other *yajamanas* delight you much; hence these *somas* are for you alone.[439]

More significant, however, are two other *riks* in which the *yajamanas* were described as receiving shares (*bhaagam*) of the tribal wealth and also as attending the council (*vidatha*):

Sarasvati, whom the fathers invoked and who, coming from the south, pervades the *yajna,* — may she give to the *yajamanas* the shares (*bhaagam*) of the food, fostering wealth a thousand-fold.[440]

O Agni, the possessor of food, the expert sons of Vasistha invoked you in the assemblies (*vidathesu*) with praises; do give us, the *yajamanas,* increasing wealth and protect us always with well-wishes.[441]

[435] i. 127. 2.
[436] x. 45. 11.
[437] x. 151. 4.
[438] iii. 35. 5.
[439] x. 160. 1.
[440] x. 17. 9.
[441] x. 122. 8.

All these occur in the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda* and from this it may be legitimate to infer that the later sense of the word *yajamana* was not uniformly established even towards the close of the Rig Vedic period. For in these *riks* the *yajamanas* were still the collective body of people whose desire for material wealth had formed the kernel of the early Vedic songs.

Of course, these Vedic songs, like the songs of truly primitive peoples all over the world, were aspects of some ritual process. It may not be possible for us to reconstruct the exact picture of the rituals in which the songs of the *Rig Veda* were originally employed. The version of the rituals that we have in the ritual-books is in the form of their later malignant growth. However, even granting that these later versions of the rituals were not entirely the inventions of the later priests but simply elaborate rationalisations of the original rituals as divorced from their original contexts and rendered obsolete by the economic progress, it may be still possible for us to have some indication of these original rituals from certain features that persistently characterised their later forms. One of these persistent features was the pouring out of the libation, – mostly in the form of the *soma*. We may therefore argue that this act must have formed part of the original rituals, whatever might have been the significance then attached to it. What interests us from the point of view of our present enquiry is that, though in the later rituals this formed part of the characteristic function of the paid priests employed by the *yajamana*, as we penetrate into the prehistory of the Vedic *yajna*, we find the *yajamana* himself performing the function. The implication is that the distinction between the priest and the *yajamana* had not then emerged: the *yajamana* was himself the performer of the ritual. Here are some characteristic evidences:

The *yajamana* rules with the oblations (*saste yajamanah havibhih*).[442]

(O Indra), you instruct the *yajamana*, the offerer of the oblation, in your mighty wealth (*yajamanaya siksasi sunvate bhuri te vasu*).[443]

(Indra) bestows beneficial strength to the *yajamana*, the offerer of the oblation.[444]

To the *yajamana*, the performer of the good actions, the maker of gifts and the offerer of oblations....[445]

O Pusan, follow the cows of ours, the *yajamanas*, the offerers of the oblation, the singers of praises....[446]

[442] i. 24. 11.
[443] i. 81. 2.
[444] i. 83. 3.
[445] i. 92. 3.
[446] vi. 54. 6.

O Indra and Agni, listen to the call of the *yajamana*, the offerer of oblations.[447]

This does not mean that throughout the *Rig Veda*, the distinction between the *yajamana* and the priest remained absent. Being a collection of a vast number of verses composed over a very long period, the *Rig Veda* retained on the one hand, the relics of the primitive past, while on the other, it clearly foreshadowed the shape of things to come. Many a *rik*[448] indicated the growing distinction between the *yajamana* and the priest in the later sense. We shall mention here only two interesting examples. 'On the banks of the Asikni (Chenab) the *yajamana* is, as it were, *the hota* (*asiknyam yajamanah na hota*).'[449] Hota was one of the well-known later priests. The special interest of this *rik*, however, is in the use of the word *na*, 'as it were.' Evidently, this is an indication of the uneven development of the Vedic peoples: the living experience of the poet was that the *hota* and the *yajamana* were separate persons and that is why he was wondering at the lack of this distinction among those who lived on the banks of the Asikni.

One result of this ultimate separation of the *yajamana* from the priest, i.e., of the development of a separate class as priests, was the transformation of the *yajamana* to a status of a total parasite, so far at least as the process of *yajna* was concerned. We find this clearly recorded in one of the latest additions to the *Rig Veda* (*Valakhilya Suktas*: these were so late that Sayana considered them not worth commenting upon).

When the priests (*ritviks*) consciously shoulder the responsibility of the *yajna*, what can be the need of consciousness on the part of the *yajamana*?[450]

To sum up: the evidence of the word *yajamana* itself goes to show that the Vedic ritual was not originally the performance of the sacrifice by the priests for the benefit of the individual patron who financed it. That is, it was not *yajna* in the later sense. But if it was not so, what then was its original form?

It is not necessary for our argument here – nor do we think it possible – to try to reconstruct a full picture of the original rituals in which the early songs of the *Rig Veda* were supposed to be employed. We are going to argue only two points about the Vedic *yajna*: First, according to the admission of the most

[447] vi. 60. 15.
[448] i. 51. 8; iii. 53. 3; v. 44.13; v. 45. 5; vi. 15. 16; etc.
[449] iv. 17. 15.
[450] viii. 58. 1.

authentic Vedic tradition, the *yajna* as described in the later ritual books was *not* the *yajna* as originally practised by the early Vedic people. Secondly, the *yajna* as originally practised was vitally related to the productive technique – and was, in fact, an inseparable aspect of it – and this, too, had been explicitly admitted by the authentic Vedic tradition itself.

Here are some passages from the *Aitareya Brahmana*:

The *yajna* went away from the gods; it they sought to start up with offerings; in that they sought to start it up with offerings that is why offerings have their name. They found it; he prospers having found the *yajna* who knows thus.[451]

The *yajna* went away from the gods; the gods could do nothing, they could not discern it. They said to Aditi, 'Through thee let us discern the *yajna*.' She said, 'So be it, but let me choose a boon from you'. 'Choose' (they replied). This boon she choose, 'Let the *yajna* begin from me and end with me'. 'So be it' (they replied). Therefore there is a pap to Aditi as introductory (offering), (a pap) to Aditi as concluding (offering), for as a boon by her was this chosen.[452]

The *yajna* went away from the gods; they sought to start it up with the directions; in that they sought to start it up with the directions, that is why the directions have their name (*praisa*). It they made radiant with the Puroruces; that is why the Puroruces have their name. It they found on the altar; in that they found it on the altar, that is why the altar has its name (*vedi*). It, when found, they drew off with drawing (cups); in that they drew it off with drawing (cups), that is why the cups have their name (*graha*).

Having found it they made it known by Nivids; in that having found it they made it known (*nyavedayan*) by Nivids, that is why Nivids have their name. He who seeks what is lost desires something great or small; of the two he who desires the greater has the better desire; he who knows the directions as ever greater, knows them better, for the directions are a seeking for what is lost; therefore standing bent forward he gives directions.[453]

The artificial nature of some of the points in these speculations is obvious. Equally obvious, however, is the necessity that led the author of the *Brahmana* to such forced afterthoughts: *yajna* in its original form was lost to them and they were trying only to reconstruct the lost *yajna* in terms of their own understanding. The key to these passages is to be found in the persistent theme of the *Aitareya Brahmana* that '*yajna* went away from the gods.'

But why were the gods so much concerned with the loss of *yajna* and why did they try to rediscover it so desperately? The *Aitareya Brahmana* leaves us in no doubt as to the answer: *yajna* was originally connected with the mode of obtaining food

[451] i. 2. (tr.) Keith RVB 108.
[452] i. 7. (tr.) Keith RVB 111. [453] iii. 9. Keith RVB 170.

and as such the loss of *yajna* meant a threat to the means of subsistence:

> The *yajna* went away from the gods (saying), 'I shall not be your food.' 'No', replied the gods, 'Verily thou shalt be our food.' The gods crushed it; it being taken apart was not sufficient for them. The gods said, 'It will not be sufficient for us, being taken apart; come, let us gather together the *yajna*.' (They replied) 'Be it so.' They gathered it together; having gathered it together they said to the Asvins, 'Do ye two heal it,' the Asvins are the physicians of the gods, the Asvins the Adhvaryus; therefore the two Adhvaryus gather together the cauldron. Having gathered it together they say, 'O Brahman, we shall proceed with the Pravargya offering; O Hotri, do thou recite.'[454]

So these were only the shattered pieces of the original *yajna*, crushed by violence and in need of the healing art of the Asvins, that the gods were eventually left with; and they were trying to reconstruct it so desperately because the *yajna* had originally been a vital aid to the mode of obtaining food. And this is not an isolated theme in the *Aitareya Brahmana*:

> The *yajna* as food departed from the gods; the gods said, 'The *yajna* as food hath left us; this *yajna*, food, let us search for.' They said, 'How shall we search?' 'By the *Brahman* and the metres, they said.' They consecrated the *Brahmana* with the metres; for him they performed the *yajna* up to the end; they also performed the joint offerings to the wives (of the gods). Therefore now also in the consecration offering they perform the *yajna* right up to the end, they also perform the joint offerings to the wives.... They performed the guest reception; to him with the guest reception they came nearer; they hastened with the performance.
>
> They made it end in the sacrificial food (*ida*.: it might have originally meant simply food being equivalent to *ila* in the *Rig Veda*:[455] in any case the suggestion here is that of sharing the common meal with the guests as the culmination of the *yajna*). Therefore now also the guest reception ends in the *ida*.... Having obtained him (*yajna*) they (the gods) said, 'Serve us for food'; 'No,' he replied, 'how can I serve you?' Then he only looked at. To him they said, 'With the *Brahman* and the metres becoming united do thou serve us as food.' 'Be it so' (he replied). Therefore now also the *yajna* becoming united with the *Brahman* and the metres bears the *yajna* to the gods.[456]

The gods were, of course, the remote ancestors the Vedic peoples and the *yajna* as reconstructed in the age of the *Brahmanas* had a pronounced Brahmanical bias. This becomes clearer in the following passage of the same text:

> Prajapati created the *yajna*; after the creation of the *yajna* the holy power (Brahma) and the lordly power (*Ksatra*) were created; after the holy power and the lordly power both kinds of offspring

[454] i. 18. Keith RVB 121.
[455] Monier-Williams SED 164. [456] iii. 45. Keith RVB 193-4.

were created, those who eat the oblations and those who do not eat the oblations; after the holy power those that eat the oblations, after the lordly power those that do not eat the oblations. The Brahmans are the offspring that eat the oblations; the Rajanya, Vaisya and Sudras those that do not eat the oblations. From them the *yajna* departed; it the holy power and the lordly power pursued; the holy power pursued with the weapons of the holy power; the lordly power with those of the lordly power. The weapons of the holy power are the weapons of the *yajna;* the weapons of the lordly power are the horse chariot, the corslet, the bow and arrow. The lordly power returned without attaining it; from its weapons it turns away trembling. The holy power followed it and obtained it; having obtained it it kept blocking it from above; it being obtained and blocked from above standing, recognising its own weapons, went up to the holy power. Therefore even now the *yajna* finds support in the holy power and in the Brahmana. The lordly power then followed it; it said, 'Do thou call upon me in this *yajna.*' 'Be it so,' it replied, 'lay aside thine own weapons, and with the weapons of the holy power, the form of the holy power, becoming the holy power, do thou come to the *yajna.*' 'Be it so,' (it said). Thus the lordly power,... having laid aside its own weapons, with the weapons of the holy power, went to the *yajna*. Therefore, now also the Ksatriya, as the *yajamana,* having laid aside his own weapons, with the weapons of the holy power, with the form of the holy power, becoming the holy power, goes to the *yajna*.[457]

This passage clearly relates the reconstruction of the *yajna* as it took place in the later times with the emergence of caste-distinction: *Yajna* was in practice before the separation between the holy power and the lordly power, and only eventually it became the special prerogative of the holy power, the Brahmanas. Besides, the story that *yajna,* after it deserted the gods, was pursued by the Brahmanas and the Kstriyas and that it agreed to return only to the Brahmanas because the weapons of the Brahmanas were the weapons of *yajna,* has its obvious relevance for our argument: the priests of the later times grew out of the primitive magicians, as the primitive magical rituals passed into the sacrifices of the later times. That this superiority of the priestly power was in fact based upon a distinct compromise with the kingly power is evident from the following suggestion of the *Aitareya Brahmana* which occurred in the context of the prescriptions for the '*prevention of decay of yajna*'.

... The following he should certainly offer with: 'I have recourse to the holy power; may the holy power guard me from the lordly power; to the holy power hail!'.... Thus it delighted guards him from the lordly power. Then after the concluding formulas of the final offering of a cow (he says): 'I have recourse to the lordly power; may the lordly power guard me from the holy power; to the lordly power hail!'.... He who has recourse to the kingship has

[457] vii. 19. Keith RVB 309-10.

recourse to the lordly power, for the kingship is the lordly power. Him who has recourse to the lordly power the holy power does not oppress. 'May the lordly power guard me from the holy power,' he says, in order that the lordly power may guard him from the holy power; 'To the lordly power hail!' (he says): thus he delights it. Thus it delighted guards him from the holy power. These two libations are the prevention of decay of the *yajna* and the gifts; therefore they must be offered.[458]

In short, from now on the *yajna* could be protected only by pacifying the kings and the priests. Without this, there would be the aggressiveness of the two ruling classes to destroy the *yajna*. *Yajna*, as rediscovered or reconstructed in the later period, was thus already clearly connected with the privileged classes. Indeed, this gives us a picture of the *yajna* very much different from the one depicted in the songs of the ancients; for *yajna*, in these early songs, was only the ritual meant to ensure the fulfilment of the collective wish.

But let us concentrate on the evidences of the *yajna* being originally connected with the modes of obtaining the means of subsistence. The indications are clear. '*Yajna* as food departed from the gods; the gods said, "The *yajna* as food hath left us; the *yajna*, food, let us search for."' If the *yajna* was that which, when lost, meant also the loss of the means of subsistence, and, in seeking back which the gods were also seeking back the means of subsistence, then the *yajna* must have been, originally, vitally related to the technique of obtaining the means of subsistence. But how could it be thus related? Only as magical rituals meant to ensure the primitive labour process, the illusory technique in aid of the real technique. Eventually, however, i.e., as rediscovered or reconstructed according to the *Aitareya Brahmana*, this illusory technique was fully divorced from the real technique – the magical rituals from the labour process itself – and thus became pure illusion: barren, meaningless and absurd. Further, unimpeded any longer by the actual technique, it went on acquiring a fantastically elaborate form according to the fantastic logic of pure illusion itself, until it culminated into a malignant meaninglessness, namely the sacrifice of the later period.

But things in the past were different. There was already a reference to the past in the name *Yajur Veda*. It was the earliest text foreshadowing the form of *yajna* as sacrifice of the later sense. The literal meaning of *yajuh*, the knowledge (*veda*)

458 vii. 22. Keith RVB 311.

of which was compiled in the *Yajur Veda*, is: '(They) performed the *yajna* in the hoary past, *yaj lit us*.' Thus, along with a reference to the past, there was, in the use of the plural, also a reference to the ancient collective functioning.

One of the recensions in which this *Veda* is preserved for us is called the *Vajasaneyi Samhita*. *Samhita* means collection. But what is meant by *vajasaneyi*? The word is obviously derived from *vaja* or food; one who increases food is *vajasana*. The implication, again, is that the knowledge of the rituals compiled in this *Samhita* were originally supposed to have direct bearing on the productive technique.

A ritual discussed in all the recensions of the *Yajur Veda* is named Vajapeya. This name, again, is rooted in the same word for food, *vaja*. *Peya* means the drink. Even according to authentic orthodox tradition, the ritual literally meant 'food and drink', and the original connection of this ritual with the activity of food-production – particularly agriculture – was not completely absent in the later speculations on it. This is evident from the observations of Keith:[459]

> The priests of his (the sacrificer's) people touch him with bags of salt earth in Asvattha leaves or in Asvattha boxes, clearly as a means of securing fertility, showing that the offering is more than a mere piece of magic for the glorification of any individual person. With this is in harmony the insistence of the Sankhyayana (xv.1.1.) on the fact that the rite is available to any one who desires *annadya* (i.e., the eating of food), and the name is explained as 'food and drink,' a version found in the *Satapatha* itself. Moreover, this accords with the *mantras* (spells) used in touching the sacrificer, *annaya tva* (i.e., to you for the sake of food) etc., and the rule in *Sankhyayana* (xvi. 17. 4) that the offering can be made for a Vaisya, to which may be added the consecration of the sacrificer for *krisi* (agriculture) in the *Vajasaneyi* (ix. 22. d) and possibly the connection of the Maruts, 'the people among the gods,' with the rite.

All these, according to Keith, were among the 'popular features' of the rite. As depicted in the later ritual books, said Keith, the rite is 'essentially already a priestly one,' but 'in sacerdotalising the rite the priests have still retained its popular features.'[460] This is certainly correct; however, we have only to add that these relics of the 'popular features,' as clues to the prehistory of the rite, lead us ultimately to recognise the collective magic of

[459] VBYS intro. cx. It may be remembered here that the *Yajur Veda* was much later than the *Rig Veda* so that by the age of the *Yajur Veda* the Vedic people already learnt agriculture.
[460] *Ib*.

the primitive ancestors of the Vedic people, whose actual technique of production, being poorly developed, was vitally dependent upon the illusory technique of magic and this must have formed the original core of the rite. *Yajna* was thus originally only the ritual of production, whatever might have been its later malignant growth.

That the *yajnas* as discussed in the later ritual books are full of magical elements is a point already exhaustively discussed by Keith[461] himself. If this be so then these magical elements must be looked upon as survivals of the original *yajna*, i.e., the later sacrifices were but the artificial transformation of the early magical rituals. But this is precisely the point which Keith strongly doubted. In fact, he argued against 'the preconceived doctrine of the priority of magic.'[462]

> The exaltation which saw in the poetry of the *Rig Veda* the highest form of honour which the gods could receive, would scarcely trouble itself about the lower field of magic. But we cannot believe that there was ever a time when the Vedic sacrifice was not filled with magic elements, and all that we can say with certainty is that the desire to see magic in everything was one which was growing in the period of the *Brahmanas*, which degrade the sacrifice from the position of an appeal to the bounty of heaven to the position of the greatest power on earth, which controls the gods and produces whatever is desired by the priests.[463].

If this be true, then our view of magic passing into sacrifice cannot be tenable. We have, therefore, to consider carefully the problem of the relation between 'magic' and 'sacrifice' in the sense of propitiation in the Vedic literatures. The problem is important and the evidence of the Vedic literatures is, at least apparently, quite peculiar. We have, therefore, to go into some details over this. It was Macdonell who opened the discussion and we may begin with his observations.

He started from the essential difference between 'sacrifice' and 'magic': the former 'is meant to propitiate the gods' while the latter 'to control the course of things.'[464] The problem of the relation between the two arises from the apparent peculiarity of the Vedic evidences. The oldest of the Vedic literatures is the *Rig Veda*, and it is usually taken to be a collection of prayers meant to propitiate the gods. 'Only a dozen of its 1028 hymns are concerned with magic', said Macdonell.[465] Magic elements become increasingly obvious in the later works — the *Atharva*

461 RPV ch. 22.
462 *Ib*. 379.
463 *Ib*. 379-80.
464 ERE viii. 312.
465 *Ib*. viii. 311.

Veda, *Yajur Veda* and the *Brahmanas*. Under these circumstance, the Vedic evidences appear to indicate an inversion of the usual sequence: religion seems to have degenerated into magic and as such religion must have been prior to magic.

As to any magical rites connected with the sacrifice the *Rig Veda* gives us no information. On the other hand, magic is the main and essential subject-matter of the *Atharva Veda;* it is a collection of metrical spells, largely to be accompanied by ceremonies aiming at the welfare of the magician or the injury of his enemies. The *Yajur Veda* occupies an intermediate position between these two *Vedas* as regards magic. In its original part, which consists of prose formulae, the gods are only secondary, bearing a kind of mechanical relation to the sacrificial ceremonial with which these formulae are associated, and which they follow in its minutest details. Its character is thus of a magical rather than a religious type. The great development, in this period, of an intricate ritual and the concentration of sacerdotal thought on its perfect performance had led to the new conception that sacrifice was not meant to propitiate the gods, but directly to control the natural course of things. The prose theological works called *Brahmanas*, which represent the next stage of Vedic literature, being concerned with explaining and interpreting the details of the ritual, supply much information regarding the magical notions and observances with which the sacrificial ceremonial was permeated.[466]

However, in spite of this, Macdonell hesitated to argue in a straightforward manner that the *Rig Veda* knew only religion and sacrifices which were eventually superceded by the rise of magic:

It is thus impossible to suppose that the sacrificial priests of the *Rig Veda*, the composers of the old hymns, should have occupied an isolated position, untouched by magical practices derived from a much earlier age and afterwards continued throughout the priestly literature of later times. In fact, a close examination of the hymns of the *Rig Veda* actually affords evidence that even in them the belief in magical power independent of the gods is to be found.... Every page of the *Brahmanas* and of the ritual *Sutras* shows that the whole sacrificial ceremonial was overgrown with the notion that the sacrifice exercised power over gods and, going beyond them, could directly influence things and events without their intervention. An incipient form of this notion already appears in the *Rig Veda*, where exaggerated sacrificial powers are in several passages mythically attributed to ancient priests.... The composers of all such passages must have attributed to the sacrifice in their own day the powers which they thus projected into the past.[467]

Still, according to Macdonell, 'the hymns of a magical character found in the *Rig Veda* are very few and late,' that the *Rig Veda* as a whole was a book of prayer and sacrifices and that only in the later ritual literatures the old sacrifices were 'receiving a

[466] *Ib*. viii. 311-2. [467] *Ib*. viii. 312.

magical turn' and magical acts were given 'the garb of sacrifice.'[468] In short the history of the Vedic people was strange and exceptional because, in their case, sacrifices and prayers were gradually converted into magical rites, i.e., religion passed into magic.

Are we really obliged to accept such a freakish process of history? There are, to begin with, certain general considerations against it.

The view that among the Vedic people religion gradually degenerated into magic rests upon two major assumptions. First, the songs of the *Rig Veda* were pure prayers. Secondly, the *Rig Veda* was anterior to the *Atharva Veda*, the book of spells and magic charms.

Modern scholars, it is true, are often inclined to interpret the whole of the *Rig Veda* as a compilation of prayers and sacrifices. However, there is the risk of an over-simplification involved in this. For the fact remains that the *Rig Veda* is not only vast but also highly complex and, as we have already seen, words change more slowly than the meanings attributed to them. Secondly, as is well known, even the strictly orthodox tradition mentions[469] fundamentally different approaches to the true spirit of the *Rig Veda*, i.e., there were different schools of interpretation of the text, and this shows that the interpretation from the point of view of the prayer-motive cannot be looked at as the only possible interpretation. Besides, as we have already elaborately argued, at least in a large number of references the gods of the *Rig Veda* were yet to become fully divine; and, if that was so, the mere mention of a god in a hymn is no incontrovertible proof of the hymn being a prayer in the modern sense. And if these were not prayers, there could not be any question of propitiating the gods with these. This makes the sense of sacrifice, too, rather remote; for, according to the admission of Macdonell himself, it is this attitude of propitiation which distinguishes sacrifice from magic. This does not obviously mean that one cannot discover gods in the modern sense and, therefore, also the motives of prayers and sacrifices, anywhere in the *Rig Veda*. It would indeed have been a wonder if the situation was really so, for the different hymns, even on a very conservative chronology, could have been separated from each other by centuries. Thus, even if some of the hymns reveal the

468 *Ib.*
469 See Sayana's preface to the commentary on *RV*.

Vedic gods as fully divine and express the clear motive of prayers and sacrifices, they point to an anterior stage of the development of the Vedic people at which these had not been so. But the question is: If, during such an anterior stage of development, the Vedic people did not know of gods in our sense, nor prayers and sacrifices as we understand them, what could have been the purpose which these served, or the object for which these were employed? They certainly could not have been pure poetry in the modern sense because of the very simple reason that the primitive peoples never had any such thing. The claim of one school of interpretation that all the *riks* were originally designed to be used in the *yajnas* as expounded in the *Brahmanas* cannot be true either. For we have already seen, the *yajnas* in the sense of the *Brahmanas* must have been much later products than the *Rig Veda*. We are thus led to assume that the *riks* had some ritual use, though it could not have been specifically the use as claimed by the *Brahmanas*. And, though we may be yet far from knowing the exact form of the original rituals in which they were employed, the comparative method leads us to the presumption that they must have been of the nature of the magical rituals still found to be performed by the surviving savages. Thus, even if some of the hymns as collected in the *Rig Veda* had already acquired the characteristics of prayers and propitiations, it would be an oversimplification to think that the entire *Rig Veda* was nothing but a collection of prayers and sacrifices as found in developed religions.

Secondly, the view that among the Vedic people exalted religion gradually degenerated into lower magical rites, rests upon a mechanical understanding of the relative chronology of the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. It is said that the *Atharva Veda*, the collection of spells and charms, was later than the *Rig Veda*, the book of prayers; and therefore we have here an incontrovertible proof of magic superceding religion. But the argument is too simple to be convincing. For it is not enough to say that the *Atharva Veda* was later than the *Rig Veda*; it is necessary to go a step further and ask ourselves: later in what sense? As a compilation or collection it was indeed later, and as such, it did contain pieces that were very late products. But this by itself proves nothing against its antiquity. As Winternitz[470] clearly put the point:

[470] HIL i. 127.

But even though it is certain that *our version* of the *Atharva Veda Samhita* is later than that of the *Rig Veda Samhita*, yet it by no means follows from this that the hymns themselves are later than the *Rig Veda* hymns. It only follows that the latest hymns of the *Atharva Veda* are later than the latest hymns of the *Rig Veda*. However, certain as it is that among the hymns of the *Atharva Veda* there are many which are later than the great majority of the *Rig Veda* hymns, it is equally certain that the magic poetry of the *Atharva Veda* is in itself at least as old as, if not older than, the sacrificial poetry of the *Rig Veda*, that numerous pieces of the *Atharva Veda* date back into the same dim prehistoric times as the oldest songs of the *Rig Veda*. It will not do at all to speak of a 'period of the *Atharva Veda*.' Like the *Rig Veda Sahita*, so too the collection of the *Atharva Veda* contains pieces which are separated from each other by centuries. Only of the later parts of the *Atharva Veda Samhita* it can be said that many of them were only composed after the pattern of the *Rig Veda* hymns.

The name by which the genuinely old Indian tradition knew the *Atharva Veda* was Atharvangirasah, i.e., the Atharvans-and-the-Angirases. It needs to be noted that the poets of the *Rig Veda* themselves remembered the two names as those of ancient magicians: 'With mighty spells the Fathers (Angirases) found the hidden light and produced the dawn.'[471] 'The Fathers (Angirases) adorned the sky with stars, like a black steed with pearls; they placed darkness in night and light in day.'[472] 'With their kindled fire the Angirases found the cows and steeds hidden by Pani.'[473] 'They (the Angirases), by their *rita*, caused the sun to mount the sky.'[474] 'The Atharvans, by their rites, first prepared the paths; then the sun, the guardian of ordinances, was born.'[475] And so on. Do not all these indicate that the original magic-songs, the knowledge of which was later compiled in the *Atharva Veda* Samhita, is to be traced to a period which was remembered as did antiquity even by some of the poets of the *Rig Veda*?

The point to be specially noted in determining the relative chronology of the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* is that both these were after all collections or compilations of pieces that came down to the compilers from a distant past. Under these circumstances, the possibility remained that the same pieces of the ancestral compositions should find place in both. As a matter of fact, this did actually happen. The twentieth book of the *Atharva Veda* contains little beyond the hymns that also found place in the *Rig Veda*; besides, about one-seventh of the

[471] vii. 76. 4.
[472] x. 68. 11.
[473] i. 83. 4.
[474] x. 62. 3.
[475] i. 83. 5.

whole of the *Atharva Veda* consists of the same hymns that are also found in the *Rig Veda.*[476] This peculiarity is usually explained by the assumption that the compilers of the *Atharva Veda* picked them up from the *Rig Veda* which was already compiled. But there is no conclusive evidence to prove this. On the other hand, chances are more that the compilers of both were drawing upon the same sources, — the same stock of the ancestral compositions orally transmitted to them. If such were really the facts, it becomes really impossible for us to be certain that all the hymns that eventually found place in the *Rig Veda* were originally meant to be prayers or propitiations as contrasted with magic.

Thus, in order to determine the relative precedence of magic and religion among the Vedic people, we cannot depend only on the relative chronology of the two *Vedas as compilations*. It would be much more fruitful to raise questions concerning the use of the compositions during their original pre-compiled prehistory. For with all the measures taken in the Vedic tradition to maintain the verbal purity of the original compositions in the process of transmission to subsequent generations, the fact remains that the later inheritors of these early compositions were all living under altered conditions and were therefore obliged to look upon their inheritance from their own standpoint. And in this sense they were only likely to impute to these early compositions some altered significance that was really the product of their own altered conditions.

This point can possibly be illustrated by the *Atharva Veda* itself. We have already seen the overwhelming importance of the sense of collectivity as reflected in the earlier portions of the *Rig Veda*. But this was substantially lost to the charms and songs as compiled in the *Atharva Veda,* for these are found mostly to serve the interests of the individual. That is, the magic songs as compiled even in the *Atharva Veda* had lost much of their original magical character and had passed into what is called witchcraft. This distinction between magic and witchcraft is important: 'witchcraft is the misapplication by individuals of magic, which was designed for the service of the community.'[477] Of the two capital offences recognised by a truly tribal society, one was witchcraft.[478] The magical motive in this sense, — i.e. in the sense of serving the collective interest —

[476] Winternitz HIL i. 121.
[477] Thomson SAGS i. 132. [478] *Ib.*

is almost completely undermined by witchcraft in the *yajnas* as discussed in the *Brahmanas*. For these were meant to serve the purpose only of the rich patron financing the *yajna*. However, the *Atharva Veda* seems to present a somewhat intermediate position. The magic-songs, as collected in it, though largely contaminated by the interests of the individual, retained nevertheless indications of the charms originally serving the collective interest. This will be confirmed by the following comments of Winternitz, though, unfortunately, the author did not maintain in his writings the strict distinction between magic and witchcraft:

> The songs of magic in the *Atharva Veda* which, according to their main contents, are certainly popular and very ancient, have no longer even their original form in the *Samhita*, but are *brahmanised*. These old charms and formulas, whose authors are equally unknown as the authors of the magic incantations and formulas of other peoples, and which originally were just as much 'popular poetry' as the poetry of magic everywhere is, have already in the *Atharva Veda Samhita* partly lost their popular character. We see at every step, that the collection was made by priests, and that the collection was made by priests, and that many of the hymns were also composed by priests. This priestly outlook of the compilers and partly also of the authors of the hymns of the *Atharva Veda*, reveals itself in occasional comparisons and epithets, as for instances, when, in a charm against field-vermin, it is said that the insects are to leave the corn untouched 'as the Brahman does not touch unfinished sacrificial food.' A whole class of hymns of the *Atharva Veda*, ... is concerned only with the interests of the Brahmans, the feeding of priests, the fees for the sacrifice, and such like, and they are, of course, the work of priests.[479]

Under these circumstances, it is only to be expected that the ancient magic-songs as later compiled in the *Atharva Veda* with a pronounced priestly bias, should lose much of their original collective interest and be employed in the interest of the individual. There is no doubt that the charms as collected in 'our *version* of the *Atharva Veda*' had largely become so. What should not be overlooked, however, is that, in spite of all the priestly bias introduced into these, the traces of the original primitive character of these magic-songs were not entirely lost even from the *Samhita* as we find it.

Commented Winternitz:[480]

> Indeed, many of these magic songs, like the magic rites pertaining to them, belong to a sphere of conceptions which, spread over the whole earth, ever recur with the most surprising similarity in the most varying peoples of all countries. Among the Indians of

[479] HIL i. 123-4. [480] *Ib*. 128.

North America, among the Negro races of Africa, among the Malays and Mongols, among the ancient Greeks and Romans, and frequently still among the peasantry of present-day Europe, we find again exactly the same views, exactly the same strange leaps of thought in the magic songs and magic rites, as have come down to us in the *Atharva Veda* of the ancient Indians. There are, then, numerous verses in the *Atharva Veda*, which according to their character and often also their contents, differ just as little from the magic formulas of the American-Indian medicinemen and Tartar shamans, as from the Merseburg magic maxims, which belong to the sparse remains of the oldest German poetry.

The examples with which Winternitz illustrated this observation are indeed interesting. What also interests us here is that granting all this to be true the only way in which we can penetrate into the prehistory of the magic-song collected in the *Atharva Veda* is an objective study of the spells and rituals of the surviving primitive peoples. Such a study will bring to light the fact that beneath all the malignant overgrowth of the Vedic *yajna* as understood later, there lay the core of primitive magic, the illusory technique that aided the real technique and served the collective interest. That is, the Vedic *yajna* was, in its origin, nothing but the ritual of production of the early Vedic people.

11. Rita and the Fall of Varuna

The Angirases, whose spells and charms, along with those of the Atharvans, formed the original core of the *Atharva Veda*, were remembered, even by the poets of the earliest stratum of the *Rig Veda*, as but hoary ancestors — the 'fathers,' 'our fathers,' 'those ancient poets,' etc. Great magical feats were of course attributed to them. They were also said to have lived the ancient collective life, a life free from jealousy in any form. All these, however, followed from the circumstances of their observation of the *rita*:

> Those ancient poets, the observers of the *rita*, were in joyful company with the gods; these ancestors gained the secret lustre; with spells of truth they generated Usas.
>
> Being united with the common cattle, they became of one mind; they strive together, as it were, nor do they injure the rituals of the gods; not injuring each other they move with wealths.[481]

Thus the Vedic poets viewed their ancient common life with a feeling of nostalgic bliss. But what was *rita*, the observance of which made the Angirases so noble and powerful?

[481] vii. 76. 4-5.

The concept of the *rita* is absolutely crucial. If we are at all justified in attributing any distinct philosophy to the ancient Vedic poets, the most important evidence in support of it is to be sought in this concept. We are going to argue that an analysis of the *rita* makes it clear that their philosophy was far from being spiritualistic or other-worldly.

Representing as it does a complex of archaic ideas, the word defies any popular rendering. It is best to leave it untranslated. However, it will not be doubted that the *rita* originally stood for a peculiar complex of the moral law and the physical law. Winternitz used it in the sense of the 'order of the universe',[482] Macdonell took it to mean the 'physical and moral order'[483] – 'The notion of this general law, recognised under the name *rita* (properly the "course" of things), we find in the *Rig Veda* extended first to the fixed rules of the sacrifice (= rite), and then to those of morality (right).'[484] According to Keith,[485] it was the term for the cosmic order as well as the moral order: 'The term for cosmic order, *rita*, and its opposite *anrita*, express also moral order.'

The Vedic poets, unlike the modern idealists who claim to discover their own world-outlook in the *Rig Veda,* raised this principle of the cosmic-and-moral order to the most exalted position.

> The dawns arise in the morning according to the *rita;* the fathers have placed the sun in the heaven according to the *rita;* the sun is the bright countenance of the *rita,* and the darkness of the eclipse is contrary to law, *vrata.* The years is the wheel of the *rita* with twelve spokes. The red raw milk, the product of the white uncooked cow, is the *rita* of the cow under the guidance of the *rita.* Agni, the fire, which hidden in the waters and the plants, is produced for man from out of the kindling sticks, becomes the shoot of the *rita,* born in the *rita.* The streams flow in obedience to the law of *rita.*[486]

Under these circumstances, the idealist interpreter of ancient Indian philosophy is left with the only scope to give an idealistic twist to this essentially pre-idealistic conception. Observed Radhakrishnan:

> . . . .*Rita* literally means 'the course of things.' It stands for law in general and the immanence of justice. This conception must have originally been suggested by the regularity of the movement of the sun, moon and stars, the alternations of day and night, and of the seasons. *Rita* denotes the order of the world. Everything that is

[482] HIL i. 154.
[483] HSL 75.
[484] *Ib.* 67.
[485] RPV 248.
[486] *Ib.* 83.

ordered in the universe has *rita* for its principles. It corresponds to the universals of Plato The world of experience is a shadow or reflection of the *rita,* the permanent reality which remains unchanged in all the welter of mutation. The universal is prior to the particular, and so the Vedic seer thinks that the *rita* exists before the manifestation of all phenomena. The shifting sereis of the world are the varying expressions of the constant *rita* So *rita* is called the father of all.[487]

This comparison of the *rita* to the Platonic ideas is fictitious. To think of an order of nature is not necessarily to reduce nature to its shadow. If there was anything that the Vedic poets did not know, it was the vaguest idea of the world being any kind of shadow of anything. We have seen how intense was their attachment to, and interest in the world they lived in. Even Radhakrishnan himself had to admit:

But the dominant note (of the *Rig Veda*) is not one of asceticism. In the hymns we find a keen delight in the beauties of nature, its greatness, its splendour and its pathos. The motive of the sacrifices is love of the good things of the world. We have yet the deep joy in life and the world untainted by any melancholy gloom.[488]

Our author would of course argue that the Vedic poets were gradually emancipated from this love for the material world and were drawn slowly to the concept of the divine that lay beneath it. As a matter of fact, the conception of the *rita* is, for him, an evidence of this:

The tendency towards the mystic conception of an unchanging reality shows its first signs here. The real is the unchanging law. What is, is an unstable show, an imperfect copy.... Soon this cosmic order becomes the settled will of a supreme god, the law of morality and righteousness as well. Even the gods cannot transgress it. We see in the conception of *rita* a development from the physical to the divine. *Rita* originally meant the 'established route of the world, of the sun, moon and stars, morning and evening, day and night.' Gradually it became the path of morality to be followed by man and the law of righteousness observed even by gods.[489]

Such a view of the conception of the *rita* as representing a development from the purely physical to the divine has no evidence to lean on. On the contrary, we have unmistakable evidence that the *rita* was, from the very beginning, as much a moral as a physical law. The close similarity of the Vedic *rita* with the Avestan *asa* (*urta*) is decisive proof of this point:

In the physical world there rules a regular order, *rita,* which is observed repeatedly, and which is clearly an inheritance from the Indo-Iranian period, since the term *asa* (*urta*) is found in the

487 IP i. 78-9.
488 *Ib.* i. 111.
489 *Ib.* i. 79.

> *Avesta,* and has there the same triple sense as in Vedic India, the physical order of the universe, the due order of the sacrifice, and the moral law in the world.... The identity of the Vedic and Avestan expressions is proved beyond possibility of doubt by the expression 'spring of *rita*,' which is verbally identical in the *Avesta* and the *Rig Veda*.[490]

There is thus no basis to state that the Vedic evidence of the *rita* reveals any history of the development of natural law into the moral law and, therefore, far less into any 'settled will of a supreme god.' As a matter of fact, far from there being any development of this sort, what we actually find in the *Rig Veda* is a gradual withering away of the concept: the Vedic poets eventually felt the loss of the *rita* which led some of them curse the *rita*-less new order and strongly urge for its revival. Thus Radhakrishnan's comparison of the *rita* to the Platonic universals, being based on an imaginary history of the development of the concept, falls through. On the contrary, if comparison of the *rita* with anything outside the Indo-Iranian literatures is at all justified, we may as well do that with the *tao* of the ancient Chinese philosophers, a possibility casually hinted at by Radhakrishnan[491] himself, but the implication of which was totally ignored by him.

Like that of the *tao* of the Taoists, the nearest etymological meaning of the *rita* would probably be 'way,' or 'order,' meaning thereby the 'order of nature.' Like the Vedic poets, the Taoists also saw the *tao* in everything and guiding everything: 'The *tao* gave birth to it. The virtue (of the *tao*) reared it.... Therefore (as) the *tao* bore them and the virtue of the *tao* reared them, made them grow, fostered them, harboured them, fermented them, nourished them and incubated them....'[492] Again, like the *rita* of the Vedic poets, the *tao* of the Taoists has often been misunderstood by the modern scholars as 'the *one* of Parmenides beneath Heraclitus' flux of things,'[493] a misunderstanding convincingly laid bare by Needham. As to how this conception of the *tao* led the ancient Chinese to the fundamentals of observational science the readers may refer to the monumental work of Needham himself. However, the Vedic *rita*, though it presumably had the same source and the same original implication, did not have the same history of development: already in the later portions of the *Rig Veda* the poets were lamenting the loss of the *rita*, and in the post-Vedic period of philosophical speculation

490 Keith RPV 83.
491 IP i. 79n.
492 Needham SCC ii. 37.
493 *Ib.* ii. 37n.

proper, the references to the *rita* were even less than casual.[494] Evidently, within the general idealistic structure of their own world-outlook, the speculators of the *Upanisads* found little scope to accommodate the ancient glory of the 'order of nature' praised so ecstatically by their early ancestors. The reality of nature, along with the conception of order in it, faded into insignificance. This, we are going to argue, was due to the degradation of manual labour in the post-Vedic society of Upanisadic speculators. Among the Taoists of ancient China, the concept of the *tao* did not suffer a similar fate, because, as Needham has so convincingly argued, the Taoists were rebels against the class-divided feudal society[495] and retained close ties with the working people, with manual work and technology.[496] Their mental labour was not detached from material labour, and as such their world-outlook was yet to be emancipated from the world[497] itself. Interestingly, in the *Rig Veda*, the passages that expressed the glory of the *rita* had direct or indirect bearing on the process of obtaining the means of subsistence.

'O Agni, your brilliance comes to us and you brought the cows of *rita* equally to us (*ritasya dhenah anayanta sa-srutah*: Sayana interpreted *sa-srutah* as *samanam gacchantyah*).'[498] 'O Mitra and Varuna, you bring *rita* for the *yajamanas* and let the *yajna* be bountiful.'[499] 'As of old, O Indra, you remain the custodian of food and the custodian of the *rita;* you help us in searching our cows and be friends with us.'[500] 'O Mitra and Varuna, O Asuras, – the possessors of *rita* – you proclaim loudly of *rita*, since you two are great experts of heaven; do connect us with cow and water.'[501] 'You two (Mitra and Varuna), possessors of *rita*, are the foremost suppliers of cows in the *yajna*. . . .'[502] 'He who gives to the bright followers of the *rita*, and whom the Adityas increase, – he, as the foremost, goes with wealth in a chariot to distribute wealth in the assemblies.'[503] 'The great Agni increased without any restraint in the expanse with water and food in the past; it lay down in the source of *rita* (*ritasya yonau*),

[494] In the principal *Upanisads*, the word occurs only seven times, —*Taittiriya;* i. 1. 1, i. 9. 1, i. 12. 1, ii. 4. 1, iii. 10. 6. *Katha*: iii. 1, v. 2.

[495] SCC ii. 100ff.

[496] *Ib.* ii.121ff.

[497] Marx & Engels GI 19-20. See the passage quoted by us in p. 229.

[498] i.141.1.

[499] i.151.3.

[500] i.132.3.

[501] i.151.4.

[502] i. 151.8.

[503] ii.27.12.

being of a charitable disposition and being friends with the water.'[504] 'Agni, the custodian of the *rita* and the possessor of the *rita*, is, like Bhaga, the leader of men.'[505] 'O Visvadevas, he who bears the *rita* – him, the seniormost, do you procure large number of cows.'[506] 'Usas, like the Dyavaprithivi (heaven-and-earth), the custodian of the *rita* and of wealth.'[507] 'O Dyavaprithivi, let your *rita* prevail that we may get wealth along with food.'[508] 'As our fathers, (Angirases), in the past, spread the *rita* so did they discover the tawny cows.'[509] 'From the ancient days, the *rita* has got many waters and much wisdom which discards the undesirables; the verses of the *rita* opened the deaf ears of men.'[510] 'The holdings of the *rita* are fast, the manifold forms of the *rita* are delightful, the praisers desire abundant food of the *rita*, by virtue of the *rita* cows are obtained and they (the cows) enter into the *rita*.'[511] 'Having pleased the *rita* the praisers gain strength and water; the earth does yield the best cows only for the sake of the *rita* and it is vast and incommensurable because of the *rita*.'[512] 'In the ancient days, Usas-es were truths born of the *rita*, who gave wealth as soon as approached and, praising whom with *uktha* ready wealth was obtained.'[513] 'Usas-es, the deity who knew the abode of the *rita*, made the cows.'[514] 'Usas, the friend of the Asvins, was the mother of cows and the protector of the *rita*.'[515] 'Desirous of the *rita*, the ancients, in the past, praised you, O Agni, for their protection – you, Agni, the Angiras, who are great delighter of the mortal, the giver of food (and the lord of the dwelling).'[516] 'O Mitra and Varuna, who, wishing for the *rita*, can get you? Protect us in the abode of the *rita*; give animals and food to those who desire *yajna*.'[517] 'You (Varuna and others) are the custodians of the *rita*, born of the *rita*, increasers of the *rita*, the terrible enemies of *anrita* (the opposite of *rita*); thus may we and other heroes remain with happiness and wealth in your abode.'[518] And many more like these.[519]

Obviously enough, we cannot look at these as philosophical

[504] iii.1.11. The *Nighantu* (i.12) suggested that the word *ritasya yoni* was one of the synonyms for water.
[505] iii.20.4.
[506] iii.56.2.
[507] iii.61.6.
[508] iii.54.3.
[509] iv.2.16.
[510] iv.23.8.
[511] iv.23.9.
[512] iv.23.10.
[513] iv.51.7.
[514] iv.51.8.
[515] iv.52.2.
[516] v.8.1.
[517] v.41.1.
[518] vii.66.13.
[519] A large number of such references may easily be found by following the word-index of the Poona edition of the *RV*.

speculations. They were rather the expressions, in the form of primitive poetry, of the grandeur and glory of the *rita* felt instinctively by the ancient poets. However, one point should be absolutely clear: the concept of the *rita*, thus variously expressed, was not the result of disinterested speculation. It was, on the contrary, intimately associated with the problem of survival. The *rita* assured the poets their cows, their water, their food, and in fact everything they considered as constituting material wealth. Being thus intimately connected with the essentially practical considerations, the concept of the *rita* was yet to acquire any spiritual significance. *Rita*, the order of nature, was also understood by the poets and their kinsmen as the most potent force assuring them of their means of subsistence. And there cannot be any doubt that the clue to the general world-outlook of the early Vedic poets is to be sought in this concept of the *rita*, rather than in any hypothetical renderings of such stray passages as the *Hamsavati Rik*,[520] the *Purusa Sukta*[521] and the *Nasadiya Sukta*.[522]

We may now proceed to answer more fully the question we have raised in an earlier Section: could the consciousness of the early Vedic poets, with all their mighty gods, be considered to have reached that stage of the development which can be positively characterised as spiritual or religious?

The distinguishing marks of religion are two assumptions.[523] First, the ways of nature are governed by the will of God, or of gods. Secondly, this will of the God, or gods, can be won over by prayers, propitiations and sacrifices, that 'we can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it (nature) to deflect, for our benefit, the current of events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow.' Thus, the question whether the consciousness of the Vedic poets reached the stage of religion proper can be answered only by finding out whether these two distinguishing assumptions of religion can be clearly recognised in their literary creations.

The concept of the *rita* is indeed a warning against any

520 *RV* iv.40.5. There is nothing at least in the literal meaning of the *rik* to justify the highly idealistic philosophy read in it by the later commentators like Sayana.

521 x.90. This is one of the latest additions to the *Rig Veda* and could even be contemporary with the earlier *Upanisads*.

522 x. 129. Besides being very late, the exact meaning of this is quite obscure. See Keith RPV 436.

523 Frazer GB 51.

hasty attempt to attribute to the early Vedic poets the religious consciousness in our sense. For the *rita*, understood rightly, goes against both the assumptions characteristic of religion. As felt by the Vedic poets, it was not the will of God, or of the gods, but the principle of the *rita* that stood for the order of the universe. An analysis of the relation between the *rita* and the gods makes it clear.

A superficial understanding of the exaggerated epithets used by the poets for their gods may mislead us into imagining that the gods were conceived as determining the course of nature. But the point is that the *gods as gods* were not doing it. On the contrary, they could do this *only in the capacity of observers or guardians, or upholders, of the rita.* The gods were even thought of as owing their very existence to the *rita*, for it was often said that they were born of the *rita* itself. All these are to be understood along with the fact that human beings, too, were similarly conceived by the Vedic poets: the ancient Angirases, as we have already seen, sat in the joyful company of the gods, and this, as observers of the *rita*.

Of all the Vedic gods, Mitra and Varuna – particularly the latter – were most often mentioned as the gods who determined the course of nature:

> Varuna's power is so great that neither the birds as they fly nor the rivers as they flow, can reach the limit of his dominion, his might, and his wrath (i.24.6) . . . He embraces the all and the abodes of all beings (viii.41.1 & 7). Varuna is omniscient. He knows the flight of birds in the sky, the path of ships in the ocean, the course of the far-travelling wind, and beholds all the secret things that have been or shall be done (i.25.7; 9 & 11) . . . . No creature can even wink without him (ii.28.6). The winkings of men's eyes are all numbered by Varuna, and whatever man does, thinks, or devises, Varuna knows (*AV* iv.16.2; 5).[524]

All these are true. Still the question is: To what did Varuna owe all this stupendous power? The Vedic poets left us with no uncertainty as to the answer. They were never tired of telling us that of all the Vedic gods Varuna (often, of course, along with Mitra) had the closest connection with the *rita*. Varuna, along with Mitra, was the guardian of the *rita* – *ritasya gopa* – and only in this capacity were they the rulers of the rivers and the bestowers of food and rain.[525] They were the revealers of the *rita* and the increasers (or upholders) of the *rita*, but all these, significantly enough, were accomplished by the aid of the *rita*.[526]

[524] Macdonell VM 26.
[525] vii.64.2.
[526] i.23.5.

'O Mitra and Varuna, you touch the *rita* and increase the *rita* with the aid of the *rita* and spread yourselves for the purpose of increasing the *yajna*.'[527] Mitra and Varuna were seen in the place of the *rita* covered by the *rita*.'[528] 'The epithet "observer of order" (*ritavan*), predominantly used of Agni, is also several times connected with Varuna and Mitra.'[529]

Now if this was the nature of the relation of the *rita* with Mitra and Varuna, what reason have we to assume that the *rita* was dependent upon the gods, or that it was the expression of the will of the gods? There is none and even Keith[530] had to admit this, though partially.

> The streams go on their way according to the *rita* of Varuna; heaven and earth further the *rita* of Mitra, and the two gods appear as the lords of the *rita*, the right. Yet on the other hand they are reduced to a lesser grade in that they appear also as the charioteers of the *rita*, the furtherers of the *rita*, the guardians of the *rita*, something which therefore exists apart from them.

The epithet for 'upholding the *rita* by the aid of the *rita*,' though mostly applied to Mitra and Varuna, was also applied to the Adityas and to the gods in general.[531] The Adityas, as also Agni and Soma were looked upon as the guardians of the *rita*.[532] The gods were often described as being born of the *rita*: Soma, the king and god, was born of the *rita* and increased manifold the *rita* with *rita* (*ritena yah rita-jatah vivavridhe raja devah ritam brihat*).[533] No wonder, therefore, that Soma was identified with the *rita* itself.[534] Agni was born of the *rita* and hence was shining (for the poet).[535] This birth of Agni from the *rita* had interestingly also a reference to the hoary antiquity: a *rik* of the oldest stratum of the *Rig Veda* referred to him as *rita-jatah purvih*.[536] Asvins, too, were born of the *rita*.[537] Being born of the *rita*, the *gana* of the Maruts was without blemish.[538] The gods themselves behaved according to the *rita*: Soma, shining with the *rita*, speaking the *rita*, was purified and flowed towards Indra.[539] The Visva-Devas (all-gods) were upholding the *rita* (*rita-dhitayah*).[540] It was because of the *rita* that Agni obtained his immortality.[541] More examples are not necessary. Evidently

[527] i.2.8.
[528] v.62.1.
[529] Macdonell VM 26.
[530] RPV 84.
[531] Macdonell VM 26.
[532] *Ib.*
[533] ix.108.8.
[534] ix.62.30.
[535] i.36.19.
[536] iii.20.2.
[537] iii.58.8.
[538] v.61.14.
[539] ix.113.4.
[540] v.51.2.
[541] i.68.4.

the principle of the *rita* was to the Vedic poets much more fundamental than any hypothetical will of the Vedic gods.

Lest we are misled to view the *rita* as the will of the gods, it is worth remembering further that the *rita* was not connected with the gods alone. Even the cows, while lowing the *rita*, obtained the technique of the *rita*.[542] Sarama, the dog, recovered the cows, with the aid of the *rita*,[543] just as the all-gods (Visva-Devas) obtained the cows by increasing the *rita*.[544]

But, as we have already indicated, the Vedic poets eventually felt the loss of the *rita*. We are going to argue that the clue to this decline of the *rita* is to be found in the sources or the origin of the concept itself. And the clue to the origin of the concept is to be found in the other implication inherent in it. The *rita* was not merely the order of nature or of the physical world but also the order of human relations.

There is no need here to go into the details of this moral aspect of the *rita*. Practically all the modern writers on the Vedic literatures have already done this.[545] However, where we venture to differ from these scholars is in regard to the relative priority of the cosmic and the moral order implied by the *rita*. *Rita*, according to the contributor to the *Cambridge History of India*,[546] meant 'first cosmic then moral order.' 'From the physical,' said the scholar[547] elsewhere, 'it is an easy step to the conception of the *rita* not merely in the moral world, . . . but also in the sphere of sacrifice.' '*Rita*,' said Radhakrishnan,[548] 'originally meant the established route of the world. . . . Gradually it became the path of morality to be followed by man and the law of righteousness observed even by gods.' And so on. In fact, this view of the development of the *rita* from the physical to the moral law has practically become a part of the accepted commonsense of the modern student of the *Vedas*.

Popular though this hypothesis is, no scholar has so far adduced any internal evidence of the *Rig Veda* in support of it. Perhaps, the nature of the text is such as makes it impossible to gather or obtain from it any *decisive* evidence on the issue. In default of any such evidence, what the scholars presumably depend upon must be considerations of general nature:

[542] x.61.10.
[543] v.45.7.
[544] iii.56.2.
[545] E.g. Keith RPV 83; Radhakrishnan IP i.109ff; Macdonell VM 26 etc.
[546] CHI i. 103.
[547] Keith RPV 83.
[548] IP i.79.

the consciousness of the moral order must be logically posterior to the consciousness of the physical order.

In arguing against this hypothesis, therefore, it would not be wrong for us to begin with considerations of general nature.

Thomson[549] has argued that 'man's consciousness of the external world was determined from the outset, not by the relations between the individual and his natural environment, but by the relations which he had established with his fellows in the development of production.... Only in this way is it possible to explain why the external world should appear so differently to peoples standing at different levels of culture.... Such developments only become intelligible when we understand that man's consciousness of the world around him is a *social* image, a product of society.'

Proceeding on the basis of this we may, in accordance with our method, ask ourselves: what is known in general about the moral consciousness of the backward peoples surviving in the truly tribal societies, which, as tribal societies, must be basically similar to that of the early Vedic poets?

The following passages are from Engels:

> The grandeur and at the same time the limitation of the gentile order was that it found no place for rulers and ruled. In the realm of the internal, there was as yet no distinction between rights and duties; the question of whether participation in public affairs, blood revenge or atonement for injuries was a right or a duty never confronted the (Iroquois) Indian; it would have appeared as absurd to him as the question of whether eating, sleeping or hunting was a right or a duty.[550]
>
> The tribe, the gens and their institutions were sacred and inviolable, a superior power, instituted by nature, to which the individual remained absolutely subject in feeling, thought and deed. Impressive as the people of this epoch may appear to us, they differ in no way one from another, they are still bound, as Marx says, to the umbilical cord of the primordial community. The power of these primordial communities had to be broken, and it was broken. But it was broken by influences which from the outset appear to us as a degradation, a fall from *the simple moral grandeur of the ancient gentile society*. The lowest interests—base greed, brutal sensuality, sordid avarice, selfish plunder of common possessions—usher in the new civilized society, class society....[551]

The Vedic *rita*, in its aspect of the human relations, must have originally been what Engels called here the 'simple moral grandeur of the ancient gentile society': the laws regulating the relations of the members of the pre class society were instincti-

549 SAGS ii.45-6.
550 OF 258.
551 *Ib*. 163. Italics added.

vely apprehended by them as sacred and inviolable, a superior power instituted by nature to which the individual remained absolutely subject in feeling, thought and deed. And if this was so, their consciousness of the external world, being a social image, could only be an extension or projection of the same. This gave the early Vedic poets their conception of the *rita* – an archaic complex of the physical and moral law, so sacred and inviolable that even the greatest gods were born of it.

This interpretation may be objected to as dogmatic and conceived merely to suit certain pre-conceived formulas rather than, what it should be, an interpretation based on direct Vedic materials. Of course, the other hypothesis that the moral aspect of the *rita* was only a subsequent development of its original physical aspect is equally without support in the internal evidences of the *Vedas*. Nevertheless, the dogmatism of one hypothesis cannot be the ground for the acceptance of another equally dogmatic position.

Fortunately, however, we can find at least some negative support for our own hypothesis in the Vedic literature itself. If the origin of the *rita* was what we are going to argue, then the breakdown of the ancient collective life should have coincided not only with a sense of the loss of the *rita* on the part of the poets, but also with that of the triumph of the new forces of greed and avarice, the values that dominate human relations in a class-divided society. And the Vedic materials appear to be quite clear on this point.

It is well known that the conception of the *rita* gradually faded away from the consciousness of the Vedic poets. Along with this also declined the ancient glory of Varuna. The reason is obvious. Of all the Vedic gods, Varuna's relations with the *rita* had been the most intimate. 'With Varuna seems to have been bound up in the first instance the conception of *rita*... and with his lessening glory these conceptions (of the cosmic and moral order) fade from Indian thought.'[552] This fading away of the *rita*, to say the least, is quite strange. No less strange, however, is the general reluctance of our modern scholars to understand it. The only notable exception to this is probably Keith, who tried to explain the loss of the *rita*. We may begin with an examination of his argument.

According to Keith, the close similarity of Vedic Varuna with the Avestan Ahura as well as of the *rita* with the *asa* points

[552] CHI i. 103.

to their Iranian origin. After their import to India, however, these conceptions failed to receive their proper nourishments, and as such had to wither away:

The figure of Ahura Mazdah cannot possibly be dissociated from Varuna who bears the epithet Asura, the terms applied to other Vedic gods, while in the later *Samhitas* the Asuras have become the foes of the gods. Like Ahura, Varuna is the lord of the holy order, *rita,* which corresponds to the Avestan *asa*: he is closely united with Mitra, as Ahura with Mithra.... But, apart from these coincidences, the mere moral grandeur of both deities can only be explained by a common origin: the history of Varuna in India is that of moral elevation which gradually disappears.... It is inconceivable that this fact should be explained in any other way than that as a god he was brought to India, when *under less favourable circumstances his moral quality evaporated.* This theory, moreover, renders it easy to understand the success of the Zoroastrian faith and its choice of Ahura as the great and only god in the proper sense of the term: it was not a creation, but the purification of a conception existing among the people of Iran.[553]

Again,

The idea of *rita* is one which, like the moral elevation of Varuna, has no future history in India, pointing irresistibly to the view that it was not an Indian creation, but an inheritance which did not long survive its new milieu.[554]

Now granting the Indo-Iranian origin of both Varuna and the *rita,* we would still need clarification on one point: What exactly was there in the 'new milieu' which prevented the survival of the moral grandeur of Varuna and the conception of the *rita?* Why was the atmosphere in India so inexplicably hostile towards these moral values? It will be vulgar materialism to try to explain such momentous changes in the consciousness of a people by climatic and other geographical peculiarities of the country. Curiously enough, Keith, with all his repulsion for materialism, was not at all reluctant to concoct such an explanation:

It may be that the stern conditions of life in Iran, where cultivation can be maintained only by unceasing toil, and the agriculturist must ever fear the incursions of the nomad, played a definite part in evoking the Zoroastrian outlook.... In India under different conditions of climate and life and racial admixture, thought turned to speculation rather than to action, and inclined to see unity, in lieu of regarding life as a struggle between the good and the bad. This contrast interposed for Zoroaster essential difficulties in regarding the world as a single whole, animated by one spirit; in India this was possible, and an absolute came to be recognised in which all was contained whether good or bad, material or spiritual. Parallel with

553 Keith RPV 33. Italics added. 554 *Ib.* 35.

this movement was necessarily the decline from power of Varuna. Indra as the god of the warrior and the people, remained powerful and popular.... Similarly the conception of the *rita* passes away before the prevalence of the *brahman*.[555]

Statements like these do not enlighten us much. Desultory and vague reference to 'different conditions of climate and life and racial admixture' can hardly explain all the farreaching ideological changes referred to. Even assuming that the conditions in India were less sterner, it is impossible to see why Varuna should have been superseded by Indra and the conception of the *rita* by that of the *brahman*. Therefore, leaving such conjectures as vague and unhelpful, we may ask ourselves a crucial question: *What were the new features that eventually developed in the social life of the Vedic people* and can these throw any light on the degradation of Varuna and the loss of the sense of the *rita*? We have, while discussing the question of the withering away of the *vidatha*, already seen how the development of the pastoral economy ultimately led to the undermining of the primitive pre-class social organisation of the Vedic people. Here alone, again, can we look for a clue to the loss of the *rita*, the simple moral grandeur of the pre-class primitive society. The withering away of the *rita* and the *vidatha* could not after all be unrelated.[556]

We have already quoted Engels on the intensification of the robber wars as a consequence of the development of the pastoral economy. This creates the conditions for the supremacy of a war-god. It is from this point of view alone that we can understand the theory of Roth and Whitney[557] that the ancient glory of Varuna, the moral governor, was finally usurped by Indra, the deity of war and plunder par excellence. Here is an internal evidence of the *Rig Veda* in support of the theory:

> O Indra, the unfriendly and obstructing human group is approaching; on this pious day snatch off the wealth from them and give it to us. May the *anrita* (the opposite of the *rita*) which Varuna, the one with *maya*, sees in us be pierced and dispelled by you.[558]

555 *Ib.* 469.

556 In a number of passages of the *RV* the *rita* and the *vidatha* were intimately related. See, e.g., i.151.1; i.159.1; ii.27.12 etc. For similar connection between the *rita* and the *yajna* see i.151.3; i.151.8; iv.56.7. In fact the modern scholars have often argued that *rita* also meant *yajna*: Keith RPV 83. This may be understood in the context of the *Aitareya Brahmana* theme of *yajna* leaving the gods.

557 See Macdonell VM 65.

558 vii. 28.4. cf. iv. 42.1-10.

This *rik* formed part of an older stratum of the *Rig Veda*. Evidently, the poets of the earlier period were yet to forget that in the standards of Varuna, the robber wars meant the opposite of the *rita*. While expressing the desire for plunder and looting, they were, therefore, appealing to Indra for protection against the wrath of the moral governor. Further intensification of such robber wars led the Vedic poets to express the desire for a clear substitution of Varuna by Indra: 'O Visible (Indra), being united with *maya* like Mitra and Varuna, you become the giver and apportioner of our food.'[559] This occurs in the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda*. Though memories of the ancient law of division still survived, the demand for a substitute god is clear in this. Evidently, the demand became inevitable in view of the changed conditions in the lives of the Vedic poets.

More interesting than this is the transformation of Varuna himself. In the later Vedic literature, the moral governor appears as a greedy god, uncanny in his insatiable demands. Engels[560] observed that greed for wealth was the key factor that transformed 'the ancient community of interest into antagonism between the members of the gens.' Varuna's change can be explained only in the light of this.

We begin with the legend of Sunahsepa as narrated in the *Aitareya Brahmana*:[561]

Hariscandra was the son of a king: 'a hundred wives were his, but he had no son from them.' On the desirability of having a son, he received the following advice from Narada:

> 'A sonless one cannot attain heaven,'
> All the beasts know this:
> Therefore a son his mother
> And his sister mounteth.
> This is the broad and auspicious path
> Along which men with sons fare free from sorrow;
> On it beasts and herds graze
> For it they unite even with a mother.[562]

The *broad and auspicious path* thus referred to may appear to us to be rather odd.[563] But in any case, this must have made king Hariscandra quite desperate. So he 'went up to Varuna, the king, (saying) "Let a son be born to me: with him let me sacrifice to thee." "Be it so" (he – Varuna – replied). To him a son was born, Rohita by name.'[564]

[559] x.147.5.
[560] OF 268.
[561] Keith RVB 299-309.
[562] *Ib.* 300-1.
[563] See Keith's interesting note: *Ib.* 301n.
[564] *Ib.* 301.

Just after Rohita was born, Varuna came to king Hariscandra and demanded his due: 'A son hath been born to thee; sacrifice to me with him.' Hariscandra played for time: 'When a victim is over ten days old then it becomes fit for sacrifice.' 'Be it so,' said Varuna. Rohita became over ten days old. Varuna appeared with his demand again: 'He hath become over ten days old: sacrifice to me with him.' Hariscandra again played for time: 'When the teeth of a victim appear, then it becomes fit for sacrifice; let his teeth appear; then let me sacrifice to thee with him.' 'Be it so,' said Varuna. Rohita's teeth appeared and Varuna appeared again with his unceasing demand: 'His teeth have appeared; sacrifice to me with him.' Hariscandra went on playing for time as before: 'When the teeth of a victim fall, then it becomes fit for sacrifice; let his teeth fall; then let me sacrifice to thee.' 'Be it so,' replied Varuna. Rohita's teeth fell. Varuna appeared again and said, 'His teeth have fallen; sacrifice to me with him.' 'When the teeth of a victim appear again,' said Hariscandra, 'then it becomes fit for sacrifice; let his teeth appear again; then let me sacrifice to thee.' 'Be it so,' replied Varuna. Rohita's teeth appeared again. Varuna reappeared with his demand: 'His teeth have appeared again; sacrifice to me with him.' 'When,' pleaded Hariscandra, 'the Ksatriya is fit to bear arms, then is he fit for sacrifice; let him win his arms, then let me sacrifice to thee.' 'Be it so.' Rohita won his arms and Varuna was prompt with his demand: 'He hath now won his arms, sacrifice to me with him.' 'Be it so,' said Hariscandra and then he addressed his son: 'O my dear one, this one gave thee to me; come let me sacrifice to him with thee.' 'No,' said Rohita, and taking his bow went to the wild, and for a year he wandered in the wilds.[565]

All these give us one picture of Varuna, a picture that is so familiar in our society: 'Three thousand ducats for three months, and Antonio bound.' But it is a picture of Varuna with which the early Vedic poets were totally unfamiliar: they knew him as the friend of friends, the protector and the benefactor, the showerer of desires. They knew him as the god with the greatest moral grandeur, the upholder of the *rita* – not the Varuna who had become a merciless monster with his uncanny demand: 'The penalty and forfeit of my bond.'

What accounts for such a transformation of Varuna? The *Aitareya Brahmana*, in continuing the legend of Sunahsepa,

[565] *Ib.* 301-2.

leaves us in no doubt as to the answer: the social organisation had changed and the ancient collective consciousness was replaced by the omnipotent power of greed. As we shall presently see, it was greed that led the hungry father to sell his son for a hundred cows; it was this greed that led the father to take up the sword to kill the son for a hundred more cows, — phenomena inconceivable in the good old days of the collective. The poor god was in fact helpless: conceived as he was in the image of man, he had to change his nature according to the new values that had begun to dominate the lives of human beings.

This is how the legend continued in the *Aitareya Brahmana*:

The runaway Rohita spent a whole year wandering in the forest. A vengeful Varuna afflicted Hariscandra with a disease: his belly began to swell up. On hearing this Rohita left the forest and returned to the village. However, on Indra's advice he disappeared once again. After another year of wandering he came back to the village for the second time. Indra advised him to 'wander'[566] again. After the third term of wandering he returned to the village. This time Indra appeared in human form and asked him to go back to the forest. Rohita fled to the wilds and wandered for the fourth year. He returned from the wilds to the village and Indra repeated: 'Do you wander.' Rohita fled to the wilds and wandered for the fifth year. But on returning to the village, he was once again advised by Indra to flee the village, and Rohita wandered for the sixth year in the wilds.

In the forest he came across a person, Ajigarta Sauyavasi, overcome with hunger. He had three sons, Sunahpuccha, Sunahsepa and Sunolangula. Rohita said to Ajigarta, 'O Seer, I offer thee a hundred; let me redeem myself with one of these (sons).' Keeping back the eldest son, Ajigarta said, 'Not this one.' 'Nor this one,' said the mother, keeping back the youngest son. They made an agreement regarding the middle one, Sunahsepa. Having given a hundred for him, Rohita took him and left the wilds for the village.

Going to his father, Rohita said, 'O father dear, come, let me redeem myself with this one.' Hariscandra went to Varuna, the king, saying, 'With this one let me sacrifice to thee.' 'Be it so,' replied Varuna, 'a Brahmin is higher than a Ksatriya.' To

[566] It is indeed a wonder to see the lofty idealistic metaphysics built up on the basis of this simple advice of Indra to Rohita to flee for life. Sen *BS* (B) 13.

him he proclaimed this sacrificial rite, the Rajasuya. On the day of anointing he took the man (Sunahsepa) as victim.

Four sacrificial priests were present. But when Sunahsepa was brought in, none of them would agree to bind him to the sacrificial post. Ajigarta said, 'Give me another hundred, and I shall bind him.' They gave him another hundred and he bound Sunhsepa to the sacrificial post.

Sunahsepa was now bound, and the *Apri* verses had been recited, but they could not find one to slaughter him. Ajigarta said, 'Give me another hundred, and I shall slaughter him.' They gave him another hundred and Ajigarta, whetting his knife, went forward.

Then Sunahsepa reflected, 'Like one that is not a man, they will slaughter me; come, let me have recourse to the deities.' Sunahsepa praised the ancient Vedic deities: Prajapati, Agni, Savitri, Varuna, the All-gods, Indra, Asvins, Usas. His bonds were loosened and Hariscandra became free from disease.[567]

A series of verses are said to have been composed by Sunahsepa bound to the sacrificial post. These were compiled in the first book of the *Rig Veda*. In these verses, he appealed to the ancient glory of the Vedic gods. One of these verses should interest us in particular:

> Keep us away from *nirriti* (the fall from the *rita*); deliver us from the sin that we have committed.[568]

It was a curse on the new order. It was also an effort to revive the memory of the past – the ancient glory of the *rita*. When the father, driven by hunger, sells the son like a chattel for a hundred cows; when, driven by greed, he proceeds to bind the son to the sacrificial post, when, further, maddened by the prospect of another hundred, he runs with the brandished sword to slaughter the son, – the son, with the heritage of the ancient *rita*, was naturally apprehensive of the new order under the new force of the *nirriti*.

And Sunahsepa was not the only poet to curse the new order. Other poets, evidently belonging to the same early post-Vedic period, did the same thing. One of them was the poet Kutsa, whose verses, too, were compiled in the first book of the *Rig Veda*. We do not know the exact cause of his dissatisfaction with the new order; the myths attributed to him in the *Rig Veda* itself were many.[569] That he was, however, a rebel is clear

[567] Keith RVB 302-4.
[568] i.24.9.
[569] Macdonell & Keith VI i. 161.

enough not only from the distinct tone of defiance which characterised his compositions, but also from the myth attributed to him by the *Brahmanas*,[570] and even by the *Rig Veda*,[571] describing him as keeping Indra a captive. The *Sarvanukramani* simply told us that he fell into a well, which fact, however, is inadequate to account for the clear Promethean tone of his curse upon the new order!

> I ask thee, O *yajna*, the ancient one (*avamam*: sayana took this to refer to Agni, the first of the gods)! Let his (i.e. *yajna's*) messenger speak with due consideration: Where is the *rita* of the past gone? Who is the new one (*nutanah*) that holds it? Know this of me, O Heaven-and-Earth.[572]

Sayana's commentary on the word *nutanah* is worth mentioning: 'if there were such a (new) one, the present condition of mine would not have been; hence there is none such.' No less interesting is the challenging tone of the *rik*, a tone that runs through the other verses attributed to the same poet:

> All these gods, who are in the three spheres, where is the *rita* of yours gone? Where, again, the absence of the *rita*? Where, as of old, are the *yajna* (*ahutih*) of ours? Know this of me, O Heaven-and-Earth.[573]
>
> Where, O gods, is the holding of the *rita*, where is the watchfulness of Varuna? Where, again, is the path of the great ways of Aryaman? And hence are we fallen in misery. Know this of me, O Heaven-and-Earth.[574]
>
> We ask of Varuna, the knower of the path and the maker of food,—I utter this from my heart, let the *rita* be born anew (*navyah jayatam ritam*). Know this of me, O Heaven-and-Earth.[575]

The language is clearly that of a rebel. And his curse on the new order is unambiguous. Did he fall into a well, or, was he thrown into one? We do not know. But we know of another dispossessed poet, belonging to the latest period of the *Rig Veda* (which might have been quite close to that of the early *Brahmanas* like the *Aitareya*) who, struck by the fear of murder,[576] wished desperately for the revival of the ancient *vraatas*, the group-life, or the tribal collectivity:

> Let our fathers (Sayana: the *samgha* of the Angirases) and the assembly of gods, give us again our mind, that we may get back our lively *vraata*.[577]

We have already seen the meaning of the *vraata*. Evidently,

570 *Ib.*
571 x.38.5.
572 i.105.4.
573 i.105.5.
574 i.105.6.
575 i.105.15.
576 *Sarvanukramani* on x.57.
577 x.57.5.

this, along with its instinctive morality represented by the ancient *rita*, were felt to have been lost to some of the later poets of the *Rig Veda*. And at least the poet Kutsa distinctly said that this was a 'fall from the simple moral grandeur of the ancient gentile society.'

We may, however, return to see the degradation caused by the new order to Varuna, the custodian of morality of the ancient period. Keith has discussed it at length.

The 'moral character of Varuna is expressed repeatedly in the most emphatic manner.'[578] This refers to the earlier strata of the *Rig Veda*. But his story does not end there:

> It must be admitted that the figure of Varuna does not increase in moral value in the course of the development of Vedic religion... Varuna is remembered as the god who has fetters and becomes in the *Brahmanas* a dread god, whose ritual in some measure is assimilated to that of the demons and the dead. After the performance of the bath, which ends the Agnistoma sacrifice, the performer turns away and does not look back to escape from Varuna's notice, and in the ceremony of that bath, when performed after the Horse Sacrifice, a man of a peculiar appearance is driven into the water and an offering made on his head, as being a representative of Varuna: this form of the expulsion of evils, which is a common idea throughout the world, shows Varuna reduced to a somewhat humble level, and degraded from his Rig Vedic eminence.[579]

With this degradation of Varuna, the Vedic gods, generally speaking, lost all sense of morality. That is how they are depicted in the *Brahmanas*. These texts, as Keith[580] has rightly pointed out, were least concerned with the problem of morality: 'these texts do not develop any theory of morality. Indeed they do not normally inculcate morality even on merely empiric grounds. The myths which they recount and invent have this characteristic about them, that they are indifferent to the moral qualities of the acts: the gods are willing to commit sins freely for their own gain. Keith has illustrated this with a series of interesting examples. Here are some of these:

The gods obtained the aid of the *raksasas* against the *asuras* on the understanding that, after obtaining victory by the united effort, the spoils would be shared by them equally; but when the victory was won, they refused to honour the promise. The gods 'are constantly jealous of men whom they refuse to allow to share with them the happiness of immortality without laying aside the corporeal body in death.' Prajapati was depicted as

578 Keith RPV 246. 579 *Ib*. 247-8.
580 *Ib*. 470. Winternitz HIL i. 207.

committing incest, and as adopting in the course of it an animal form. 'The other gods are constantly jealous of one another; they have separate dwellings, and are moved by envy of one another rather than by love and friendship.... The gods are essentially selfish; they give men the six evils of sleep, sloth, anger, hunger, love of dicing and of women.'

But, added Keith, these gods, with all their vices, appear to be 'comparatively virtuous people' by the side of Indra as depicted in the *Brahmanas*.

He makes a compact with Namuci and sets about to find a way of violating it, which he does with success; his murder of Visvarupa, son of Tvastri, is unmotivated and wicked.... His amour with Ahalya is only accomplished by means of deceiving the lady by adopting the form of her husband, and he gave over to the hyenas certain ascestics, an impure act. His adultery is repaid in kind; for his own son, born of his thigh, Kutsa Aurava, takes advantage of his physical likeness, to win the favour of Saci Paulomni, his father's wife. But, after all, what could be more degrading than the pictures of him hungry and begging a priest for an offering, and then running about cake in hand, or bound by cords by Kutsa and urged by Lusa to break away from this degrading servitude? Even his own subjects, the Maruts, he plunders, justifying the royal habit of accepting loot plundered from the husbandmen.[581]

And this was the god of the new era—the Indra who superseded the ancient Varuna. 'With this decline of the great and noble god (Varuna),' said Keith, 'goes hand in hand the decline of the interest of Indian philosophy or religion in morality as such: numerous as are the moral precepts which can be found here and there in Vedic literature, it must be admitted that it is quite impossible to find any real or vital principle of ethics.'[582] This is true and in a very important sense. The decline of Varuna along with his *rita* also marked the beginnings of the distinctly class-divided society and the moral codes that followed were invariably tainted by the outlook and interests of the ruling class. As Varuna was superseded by Indra, the ancient law of *rita* had to give place to the law of *karma*. And this was how, as early as in the days of the *Chandogya Upanisad*,[583] this law of *karma* was expounded to justify caste-rule and caste-exploitation:

Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahman, or the womb of a Ksatriya, or the womb of a Vaisya. But those who are of stinking conduct here—the prospect is, indeed,

581 *Ib.*

582 *Ib.* 434.

583 v.10.7. (tr. Hume).

that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcaste (Candala).

There is no doubt that during the entire period of subsequent Indian philosophical history, this law of *karma* reigned supreme in whatever ethical views that were evolved.

It is tempting to end this section with a comment on the verses of the poet Kutsa we have quoted. Living as he did at the beginnings of the class society, he cursed the new order and asked for a revival of the ancient *rita*: 'I utter this from my heart, let the *rita* be born anew – *vyurnoti hrida matin navyo jayatam ritam*.' What he asked was obviously impossible. Not even the mightiest spell of the Vedic poets could have reversed the laws of history. The primitive community life had to be broken and it was broken. Nevertheless, living as we do today at the close of class society, this verse of the ancient poet acquires a new significance for us. For we have before us the prospect of a new ethics, a new sense of morality, which, made infinitely richer in content by the accumulated experiences of life under a class divided society, and based upon plenty instead of the poverty of the ancient pre-class society, will, in view of the absence of exploitation and antagonism of interests, resemble the *rita* of the ancient pre-class society. And this reminds us of the quotation from Morgan with which Engels concluded his *Origin of Family*:

Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. *It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.*[584]

12 Maya : The Birth of Idealism

As remembered by the earlier poets of the *Rig Veda*, Varuna was not only the custodian of the *rita* but also the wielder of the great power, *maya*. 'The divine dominion of Varuna and Mitra,' said Macdonell,[585] 'is often referred to with the word *maya*.' What Macdonell did not notice, however, is that this *maya* of Varuna was scarcely to be separated from his *rita*:

The *maya* of Mitra and Varuna permeated the roots of the *rita* as the moon permeates everything with brightness.[586]

You two (Mitra and Varuna), possessors of the *rita* are the foremost suppliers of cows in the *yajna*...

[584] AS 562.
[585] VM 24.
[586] iii.61.7.

O Mitra and Varuna, you are the custodians of wealth and food. —you give these to men by dint of your *mayas;* neither your power nor wealth nor the rivers could be overpowered even by the Panis.[587]

This close relation between *maya* and *rita* is further evidenced by a *rik* addressed to Indra as 'the custodian of the *rita* and one who repeatedly performs *maya*,'[588] though evidently such epithets were but borrowed glories of Indra, for, like the *rita, maya* too, was most specifically connected with Varuna in the *Rig Veda*. There are also direct evidences for this: 'O visible (Indra), give us wealth; being the possessor of *maya* like Mitra and Varuna, you become the giver and apportioner of our food.'[589]

Under these circumstances, the fall of Varuna should have logically meant not only a loss of the *rita* but also a total degradation of the glory of *maya*. We have here the key to the birth of the idealistic outlook in Indian philosophy. And, in the context of what we have already argued (viz., that the fall of Varuna was symbolic of the transformation of the pre-class society), our argument in this section will try to establish that the birth of idealism in ancient India was consequent upon the emergence of class society.

However, in discussing this history of *maya* it may be useful to begin with some general idea about its significance in the post-Vedic (i.e., the Upanisadic) speculations and then return to the Vedic materials proper.

As is well known, the concept of *maya* is of decisive significance for the most outstanding school of Indian idealism, that of Samkara. His philosophy is popularly known as *maya-vada*, the doctrine of *maya*. But this description, strictly speaking, conveys the negative emphasis of the philosophy and it is better to refer to it by its other name, viz., Vedanta, or more correctly, Advaita Vedanta.

Vedanta means the closing portions of the *Vedas*. The earliest form of Indian idealism owes this name to the circumstance that its expounders were reluctant to admit it to have been the product of their own brains. As claimed by them, this was the philosophy revealed in the *Upanisads*. The *Upanisads* were appended to the *Vedas* and that gave the name Vedanta to the philosophy of the *Upanisads*.

[587] i.151.8-9.
[588] iii.53.8.
[589] x.147.5.

Badarayana offered the first systematic exposition of the philosophical standpoint of the *Upanisads,* though in the form of cryptic aphorisms, and as such his work is popularly known as the *Vedanta-Sutra.* The other name for it is the *Brahma Sutra* and this will lead us to see the positive point of the Upanisadic philosophy: the self-shining pure consciousness, called *brahman,* the ultimate reality. In the *Upanisads,* this *brahman* is identified with the *atman,* or the self in its absolute subjectivity. The logical corollary is that the world as experienced, along with the individuals experiencing it, is, in the last analysis, an illusion. *Maya* stands for this principle of illusion. From the orthodox standpoint, therefore, the doctrine of the *brahman,* along with its logical corollary, the doctrine of *maya,* forms the essence of the philosophy of the *Upanisads.* At least, that is the claim of Samkara, certainly the greatest idealist in the history of Indian philosophy.

There is some difference of opinion among modern scholars as to how far this claim of Samkara was really objective. Was his philosophy the same as that of the *Upanisads*?

Thibaut doubted this. According to him, all the later philosophers who tried to evolve a complete philosophic system on the basis of the *Upanisads,* were trying to achieve the impossible: 'On later generations, to which the whole body of texts came down as revealed truths, there consequently developed the inevitable task of establishing systems on which no exception could be taken to any of the texts; but that the task was, strictly speaking, an impossible one, i.e., one which it was impossible to accomplish fairly and honestly, there really is no reason to deny.'[590] But, he added, the task of systematising once being given, we are quite ready to admit that Samkara's system was most probably the best that could be devised.[591]

It is neither necessary nor possible to deny that there is truth in this comment at least from the historical point of view. The *Upanisads* were not philosophical treatises in the modern sense, and it would be wrong to expect any reasoned account of reality in them. Even the greatest of our modern champions of the Vedanta philosophy had to admit, 'There are sometimes attempts at reasonings, too, but then by themselves they are hardly logically convincing, having not unoften an almost infantile naïveté about them.'[592] Such reasonings apart, the texts

[590] SBE xxxiv. intro. cvi.
[591] *Ib.* xxxiv. intro. cxxii.
[592] Bhattacaryya SP 3.

are mostly compilations—often in the form of anecdotes—of what intuitively, or better, instinctively appeared to be true to the thinkers of the age trying to understand the mystery of the universe and man's place in it. Now there is no reason to attribute to the texts more coherence than what they actually possessed. Different thinkers, whose thoughts and ideas were recorded in the *Upanisads,* do not seem to have acquired the same level of philosophical abstraction and they do not, one and all, represent the idealistic outlook in a uniform manner; some of them, as we shall presently see, clearly lagged behind even the idealistic outlook itself. In short, Thibaut's comment is important in so far as it makes us conscious of the different levels of thought that were recorded in the *Upanisads.*

At the same time, he seems to misjudge the real task of the later thinkers who tried to evolve a systematic philosophy of the *Upanisads.* Their claim to read a single consistent philosophy in all the passages of the *Upanisads* was obviously exaggerated; but they had their justification in concentrating on some selected view repeatedly occurring in the *Upanisads* and in claiming that this represented the highest wisdom of the texts. They were perfectly within their rights as philosophic interpreters and systematisers even in claiming that 'the truth embodied in a particular text is inadequately expressed and should be developed or rendered more explicit in the light of other texts.'[593] In this sense, all that was later claimed as the Vedanta philosophy might not have been present in the *Upanisads* in their fully developed form; nevertheless, the potentialities of all these could have been there in the Upanisadic passages selected by Samkara and claimed by him as representing the highest wisdom of the texts.

This point is probably best illustrated by Samkara's doctrine of *maya.* Thibaut claimed that this was not to be found in the *Upanisads,* except probably in an undeveloped form in some passages of doubtful significance. At the same time he admitted that 'the final absolute identification of the individual self with the universal self is indicated in terms of unmistakable plainness.'[594] Commented Bhattacharyya:

> Now if the point were discussed as one of philosophy rather than of historical scholarship, it would not be difficult to perceive that the doctrine of *maya* is a necessary logical corollary of this doctrine of the individual being *brahman* in *moksa* (absolute liberation): for it is only in this identification that he realises that the

593 *Ib.*

594 SBE xxxiv intro. cxxii.

individuality was an illusion and that the distinction of subject, object etc., possible only through this individuality, was an illusion too.[595]

In short, the doctrine of *maya* was a logical corollary of the 'final absolute identification of the individual self with the universal self,' and if the latter was 'indicated in terms of unmistakable plainness' in the *Upanisads*, it must be admitted that the former, too, at least in its potentiality, was contained in the same texts. Samkara, an advanced and highly consistent philosopher, rightly realised that one of the basic tasks of systematising the philosophy of the *Upanisads* was to work out the potentialities of this doctrine to their logical culmination. Thus, in judging the relation between the philosophy of Samkara and that of the *Upanisads*, it is not enough for us to ask ourselves to what extent Samkara remained faithful to the words of the texts; the more important question is, did he really transgress the logical bounds determined by the basic implications – or, more properly, what he considered to be the highest implications – of these texts? The answer is clearly in the negative. From this point of view we may even add (and this as contrasted with what we have just quoted from Bhattacaryya), that if the doctrine of the final identification of the *brahman* and *atman* was indicated in certain passages of the *Upanisads*, from the historical point of view itself, we are also obliged to admit that the potentialities of the doctrine of *maya*, too, were inevitably there in the advanced speculations of the *Upanisads*, though it may be that a literal approach to the verbal implications of the texts gives us only a dim view of this doctrine in its making.

To sum up: The *Upanisads* did retain different stages of the development of philosophical thought, the most advanced of which was the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, though in its potentiality, as contrasted with its fully developed form given by Samkara. In other words, the culmination of the Upanisadic philosophy was the doctrine of the identity of *atman* and *brahman*, along with its logical corollary, the doctrine of *maya*. A self-shining pure consciousness was the ultimate reality and the world of experience, along with the individual selves enjoying or experiencing it, was, in the ultimate analysis, the product of an indescribable illusion—*maya*.

Now how the later interpreters of this doctrine of *maya* differed among themselves over its more subtle implications is

[595] Bhattacaryya SP 4-5.

not of particular interest here. We are more concerned to prove that this idealistic outlook, which represented the highest development of the philosophy of the *Upanisads*, emerged, distinctly enough, on the ruins of a primitive proto-materialistic world-outlook, the relics of which were not extinct from some passages of the *Upanisads* and, as evidenced by some other passages, the emancipation from which was consciously attempted by other philosophers of the *Upanisads.* Obviously enough, this proto-materialism in its crude primitive form was the ancestral world-outlook of the Upanisadic philosophers, i.e., the world-outlook implicit in the earlier portions of the Vedic literature. This becomes clear on an analysis of the subsoil of the concepts of *brahman* and *maya,* upon which the idealistic outlook of the *Upanisads* fundamentally depended.

The concept of *maya* first. *Maya* was known to the early Vedic poets, though the doctrine of illusion — *maya-vada* -- was totally unknown to them. On the contrary, the prehistory of this concept reveals a primordial complex of theory and practice, knowledge and action.

Our earliest and most dependable guide to the original meaning of the word is obviously the *Nighantu.* According to it, *maya* was one of the words for *praja, praja-namani.*[596] *Prajna,* as commonly understood, means wisdom, knowledge. However, the suggestion of the *Nighantu* takes us a step further. According to it, another synonym for *prajna* was *dhi.*[597] And the word *dhi* was also one of the words meaning action or *karma* — *karma-namani.*[598] Evidently, to the early Vedic poets there was no wisdom that was not also action; or, the only wisdom they knew was the wisdom of practical activity. This is further evidenced by the *Nighantu* itself. Another synonym for *karma* or action was *kratu.*[599] The same word also meant *prajna* or wisdom.[600] Further, the word *saci,* too, was a synonym for both *karma*[601] and *prajna.*[602] The implication is clear. The concept of wisdom was originally inconceivable without the concept of activity. Therefore, if *maya* originally meant *prajna* or wisdom, it could not have been wisdom in our sense of the word, i.e., wisdom as dissociated from action.

Being thus a primitive concept for the wisdom-action com-

596 iii.9.
597 *Ib.*
598 ii.1.
599 *Ib.*
600 iii.9.
601 ii.1.
602 iii.9.

plex, it was only likely for *maya* to have originally also a magical implication. From this point of view we may accept the following interpretation of the word given by Macdonell:[603]

It (*maya*) has an almost exact parallel in the English word 'craft', which in its old signification meant 'occult power, magic', then 'skilfulness, art' on the one hand and 'deceitful skill, wile' on the other. The good sense of *maya*, like that of *asura* is mainly connected with Varuna and Mitra, while its bad sense is reserved for demons.

The *Nirukta*, commenting upon the *Nighantu*, added the following:

The word is derived from the root *mam*, to measure, with the suffix *ya*, meaning 'by which the objects are given specific shape.' *miyante paricchidyante anaya padarthah.*[604]

The author of the *Nirukta* quoted the following from the *Rig Veda* to illustrate the use of *maya* in this sense:

'O Indra, with your *mayas* you killed Susna, the possessor of *maya*; the wise men know this of you and hence you increase their food.[605]

Nobody can spite the great *maya* of this god (Varuna) who is the greatest of the seers (*kavitamah*); hence he does not fill one ocean with water but sprinkles with water all the rivers.[606]

In spite of the doubtful character of the exact meaning of the second of the above *riks*, the importance felt by the Vedic poets for *maya* is obvious. Sayana, commenting upon it, took *maya* to mean *prajna*, obviously in the wisdom-action sense of the *Nighantu*. *Kavitamah*, too, according to Sayana, meant *prakrista-prajnah*, i.e., one with the highest *prajna*.

These two *riks*, by themselves, give us some idea of how far removed the concept of *maya* originally was from its later despised sense of illusion or *avidya*. Indeed, the word *avidya* was totally unknown to the early Vedic poets: it does not at all occur in the *Rig Veda*. The reason evidently is that these poets were living in a society in which the contempt for *karma* or action was yet to develop. This explains why the archaic concept of wisdom-action had so much importance in the *Rig Veda* though it was inevitably shrouded by the mythological imagination of the poets.

'O Agni, the custodian of food, the ancient *mayas* of the *mayins* (the possessors of *maya*) was yours; do you now become

603 VM 24.
604 on iii.9.
605 i.11.7.
606 v.85.6.

the friend of ours who invoke you (the *yajamanas*).'[607] 'O Indra and Varuna, you did benefit to the ancestors; the various works of yours (*virupa kritani*), O possessors of *maya*, are seen by all.'[608] 'Indra, by virtue of his *maya*, fixed the ancient mountains, rent asunder the water from the clouds, held up with his strength the earth and the heaven from falling down.'[609] 'The *mayas* of the Adityas stretched forth from their nooses towards the enemy who was oppressing.'[610] 'The God (Agni) who is the *hota* and is immortal, moves forward with *maya*, activising the assemblies (*pracodayan vidathani*).'[611] 'You, Indra, killed with your *maya* that very deer possessed with *maya* (Sayana: the deer meant Vritra in the guise of a deer).'[612] '(Indra) with his *maya* fixed the heaven from falling down.'[613] 'That fire, the son of his parents, possessed with *dhi* (*dhirah*) and with protection (*pavitra*), purifies the worlds with *maya*; and he milked semen of the ox with good semen and milk of the white cow.'[614] 'The waters which could not reach the earth with their *mayas* (*mayabhih*) — and hence could not spread over the giver of wealth (*dhanadam*), — them did Indra, the desirous, draw with his glow from the darkness with his *vajra*.'[615] Sayana's commentary on this last *rik* is also interesting. He interpreted *dhanadam* as *dhana-pradam-bhumim*, the wealth-yielding soil. Evidently, the reference here was to the rain-waters coming down to fertilise the soil: Indra, with his *vajra* pierced the cloud and helped the waters to pour down. What is specially significant is the mention of the word *mayabhih* in connection with the waters. The implication clearly is that the fertilising function of the rain-waters, too, was because of the *mayas* inherent in them. Accordingly, Sayana interpreted *mayabhih* as *sasya-upakaradibhih-karmabhih*, the activities that nourished the corns. Thus, with all the mythological imagination by which the concept of the *maya* was clouded in the early Vedic poetry, one point is quite clear: there is no action that is not due to *maya*, and even the fertilising function of the rain-waters could not be an exception to it. If all these appear strange to us, the reason is that we are not accustomed to think of the actions of nature and our own actions as being the same in quality. To the early Vedic poets, however, this was not so. We have already seen how they

[607] iii.20.3.
[608] iii.38.9.
[609] ii.17.5.
[610] ii.27.16.
[611] iii.27.7.
[612] i.80.7.
[613] ii.17.5.
[614] i.160.3.
[615] i.33.10.

wanted to conceive the cosmic order in terms of the order of human relations and how this gave them their conception of the *rita*.

We have also noted the close connection between the *rita* and the *maya*. It is therefore only to be expected that, like the *rita*, the *maya*, too, should have originally been the special prerogative of Varuna. 'O you wise, Mitra and Varuna, do protect our *vratas* (rituals) with the *maya* of the Asura, and hold the sun in the sky along with his variegated chariot.[616]' 'The great *maya* of Varuna, the famous Asura, is spoken of — he that separated the sun in the sky with his measure and made them stable.'[617] 'O Mitra and Varuna, your *maya* pervades the sky where the resplendent sun moves as with your peculiar weapon.'[618] 'O Mitra and Varuna, you hold for us food accompanied with wealth — O leaders, you come towards us with your *mayas*; with your greatness the days or the sky or oceans cannot spread over you, as the Panis, too, could not overpower you with their wealth.'[619] Interestingly, the *maya* of Usas was clearly borrowed from that of Varuna: 'With inspiring rain the Usas impregnated the great Heaven-and-Earth with *rita;* Usas spreads manifold the great *maya* of Mitra and Varuna as the moon (spreads or reflects) the sun.'[620] At the same time, this *maya* had sometimes a distinct human context. 'They (according to Sayana, the *yajamanas*) created (*mamire*, according to Sayana, milked) for him (Indra), the desirous, the desirable cows along with their names (*go*); overpowering the Asuras more and more, the people possessed with *maya* (*mayinah*) imbued this with form (*ni mamire rupam asmin*).'[621] 'The *hota* is coming holding his *vrata* high with his *maya* and holding the *dhi* which is good-looking.'[622] Thus *maya*, which was the special prerogative of Varuna, was also that with which the *yajamanas* were raising cattles and the *hota* holding his *vrata* high.

What is of special significance for our argument is that the fall of Varuna in the mythological imagination of the Vedic poets, being symbolic of the breakdown of the ancient collective life, meant for them not only a sense of the loss of the *rita*, but also a clear degradation of the ancient concept of *maya*, representing the archaic wisdom-action complex. For, when the

616 v.63.7.
617 v.85.5.
618 v.63.4.
619 i.151.9.
620 iii.61.7.
621 iii.38.7.
622 i.144.1.

society is torn up into an ennobled class of the leisured minority devoted to the cultivation of pure knowledge and a despised class of the toiling majority deprived of the opportunites for such activities, mental labour or thought (*jnana*) gets separated from the material or manual labour or action (*karma*), and the latter slowly acquires the stigma of degradation. We have already quoted the crucial passages from Marx and Engels[623] which explain this process. We may now see how the Vedic materials are illustrative of it.

The main evidence on the basis of which Roth argued that in the *Rig Veda* Varuna was eventually superseded by Indra 'is the fact that not a single entire hymn in the tenth book is addressed to Varuna, while Indra is celebrated in forty-five.' As an historical evidence, this is certainly important: the tenth book of the *Rig Veda*, which was so late that parts of it could even be contemporaneous with the early *Brahmanas* if not the early *Upanisads*, saw the almost complete decline of the ancient grandeur of Varuna. It is not of little interest, therefore, that in this tenth book we come across an unambiguous evidence of the degradation of *maya*, and this as clearly the result of the exaltation of *jnana* or pure knowledge. Here is the evidence:

One hymn in the tenth book of the *Rig Veda*[624] was addressed to a rather strange deity. Explaining its nature, Sayana said:

> With this hymn, the poet (*risi*) praised the knowledge of the ultimate *brahman*.—the knowledge which is conducive to the highest human ideal. Hence, that is the deity. According to the *Brihat-Devata*. 'Brihaspati, in this *sukta*, praised that knowledge which pervades everything, by *yoga*, as the much-shining highest *brahman*.' According to the *Sarvanukramani*, in this hymn Brihaspati praised the knowledge of Brihaspati.

Under these circumstances, modern scholars[625] are fully justified in asserting summarily that *jnana* or pure knowledge was the deity of this hymn. The whole poem, in other words, was meant to be a praise of pure knowledge. It is not necessary to argue elaborately that the fact of such an abstract conception assuming the status of a Vedic deity is itself an unmistakable evidence of the hymn being of a very late date. As is only to be expected, the author of the *Nighantu*, in his list of the Vedic gods, glossed over the deity. The following *rik* of this hymn may be taken as absolutely crucial:

[623] See P. 229 for the passages. [624] x.71.
[625] Wilson RV vi. 127; *RV* (Poona) v. 1031.

You (*jnana* or knowledge) are said to be confident in friendship (*sakhya*) in places full of food (*vajinesu*) and nobody injures you; the other roams about with his *maya* bereft of the cows, hearing words that are fruitless and flowerless (*aphalam-apuspam*).[626]

We have here a clear contrast of *jnana* with *maya;* moreover, *jnana* was firmly established while *maya* was reduced to barrenness. Sayana's commentary on *aphalam-apuspam* makes this clear: 'As a barren yet fat cow creates the illusion, "May be it gives at least a little milk," and thus roams about; as also a barren tree stands with the deceptive appearance that because it has sometimes the growth of new leaves it will blossom and bear fruit; — so does that person (with his barren *maya*) moves about repeating his words.' One step further, and this concept of *maya* would develop into the dark and unspeakable principle of cosmic illusion of the Advaita Vedanta. At least, the knowledge or *jnana* praised in this hymn was definitely of the nature of *secret knowledge*,[627] the real meaning of the word *upanisad*. The following *rik* from the same hymn makes it clear:

When the Brahmanas, who are friends, gather together with their fleet minds (*manasah javesu:* could it be that the reference here was to the free flights of speculations?) to discuss heartily, — they throw out the (ignorant) person from the altar and they go about asserting the knowledge of the *Vedas*.[628]

Note the emergence of the Brahmanas as a separate class jealously guarding the secret knowledge — an indication certainly unknown to the earlier parts of the *Rig Veda.* But the more important question is: What happens to the person thus declared to be ignorant and thrown out by the Brahmanas before they sat to discuss the knowledge of the *Vedas*? As is only to be expected from the point of view of our argument, the clear indication of the hymn is that he crowded the rank of those who were concerned with the material or manual labour.

Those unlearned ones, who do not move with those Brahmanas, nor with gods nor with those that offer the *soma* libations, having created sinful words and being *sirih*, they propagate *tantra* (*tanvate tantram*), being without knowledge[629]

We have here the only occurrence of the word *sirih* in the whole of the *Rig Veda* and its meaning is somewhat uncertain. Monier-Williams[630] and Macdonell[631] thought, though not without some hesitation, that it meant 'weaver,' probably of the

626 x.71.5.
627 Keith RPV 489; ERE xii. 541.
628 x. 71. 8.
629 x. 71. 9.
630 SED 1217.
631 VI ii. 450.

female sex. But Wilson[632] rendered it as ploughman. Evidently, he was following the suggestion of Sayana who interpreted the word *sirih* as *sirinah,* those with the *sira* or the plough. If we were to accept this interpretation, the persons thus thrown out became the tillers of the soil. The other interpretation, however, made them weavers. In any case, the two suggestions converge: such persons went to crowd the rank of the manual workers. This is precisely what makes the evidence of the *rik* absolutely crucial: we find here not only an exaltation of mental labour or pure knowledge but also a clear sense of degradation attributed to manual or material labour. This is, we are going to argue, what created the material conditions for the birth of the idealistic outlook which was eventually developed in the *Upanisads.*

However, before we pass on to discuss this, we may digress a little to see another interesting indication of this *rik*. It is in the use of the words *tanvate tantram.* We have here the only mention of the word *tantra* in the whole of the *Rig Veda.* Sayana interpreted *tanvate tantram* as *krisi-laksanam vistarayanti kurvanti,* spread or perform agriculture. At the same time, the text seemed to indicate some connection with the anti-Vedic or non-Vedic spells with the activity referred to: *vacam abhipadya papaya,* having created sinful words. Further, Sayana qualified this word *vacam* by the epithet *laukikam,* meaning either 'thiswordly' or 'of the people.' As it is undeniable that in the *RigVeda* itself the word *vacam* had some magical implication, the *laukikam vacam* of Sayana could only mean popular or this-worldly spells, which were according to Sayana, connected with agricultural operation. It may, therefore, be legitimate for us to ask one question: Do we have here any indication of the connection of original Tantrism with agricultural ritual? It is of course impossible to be certain about the answer. However, certain points must not be overlooked. We do not so far have any alternative interpretation of this lone occurrence of the word *tantra* in the *Rig Veda,* and since Tantrism was immensely old there was nothing to prevent the later poets of the *Rig Veda* from being acquainted with the word *tantra* in its distinctly technical sense. Besides Sayana's interpretation of *tanvate tantram* has to be looked upon as totally unfounded, unless it is assumed that he was drawing upon some ancient tradition which

[632] RV vi. 129.

really knew Tantrism as connected with the agricultural operation. Further, when Kulluka Bhatta[633] referred to the bifurcation of the *sruti* into two directions — the Vaidiki and the Tantriki — he was really drawing upon a very ancient tradition. For he said this on the authority of Harita who was quoted as far back as the day of Apastamba and Vasistha.[634] Could it, therefore, be that the *rik* under discussion was one of the earliest clear statement of such a differentiation, albeit the contempt for Tantrism because of its connection with manual labour in the form of the agricultural operation?

But let us return to our main point, viz., the emergence of the idealistic outlook in the *Upanisads*. Idealism, we are going to argue, came into being as a result of the separation of theory from practice and the exaltation of the former along with a degradation of the latter.

The *riks* we have just quoted indicate how, in the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda* itself, there was the exaltation of *jnana* or pure knowledge and a consequent degradation of *karma* or the manual operation. Evidently, this process was carried on still further in the *Upanisads*, a circumstance that gave the name *jnana-kanda* to these texts in clear contrast to the earlier ritual works that acquired the name *karma-kanda*. It will be objected that this contrast between *jnana* and *karma* was really a contrast between philosophical knowledge and ritual practice; Nevertheless, as we have already seen, these ritual practices themselves had a prehistory when they were vitally related to the actual labour process. In any case, it can hardly be doubted that the *Upanisads*, at least as understood by Samkara, emphasised the importance of pure knowledge or *jnana* at the cost of action or *karma* in any form, mundane or sacerdotal. Such complete withdrawal of consciousness from the life of the practical activities logically meant also complete emancipatoin of consciousness from the obligation to acknowledge the reality of the material world of practical activities. This was a resolute turning away of thought from the external world to the self — the self in its final and absolute freedom from all conceivable contacts with the external world, the purity of which could be experienced only during the state of dreamless sleep, because, only during such a state, there was complete extinction of all representations in consciousness of the external world either

[633] On *Manu* ii. 1.

[634] Kane HD i. 70.

through the mediation of the sense materials or even through that of the dream-phantoms.[635] This was *atman* or the self in its purity as understood by the advanced idealistic philosophers of the *Upanisads* and according to them this was the ultimate reality or the *brahman*.

How such a philosophical outlook was developed in the *Upanisads* is told in detail and retold by our modern scholars.[636] However, what interests us in particular — and what, because of their general aversion for materialism, our modern scholars are not particularly keen on discussing — is that such an idealistic outlook emerged in the *Upanisads* only on the ruins of a primitive proto-materialistic one, presumably representing the ancestral convictions of the Upanisadic philosophers themselves and which, presumably again, owed its materialistic character to the circumstance that this ancestral conviction was yet to witness the degradation of *maya*, the ancient wisdom-action complex. For an examination of this archaic proto-materialism, we may look into the prehistory of the concept of the *brahman* in particular.

J. Gonda[637] opens his learned monograph on the subject with an almost bewildering mass of modern theories about this archaic concept. However, the unfortunate fact remains that these theories are often based on considerations extrinsic to the strictly Vedic tradition. For, these are mostly considerations of comparative philology or of the general laws of semantics. Such considerations have their obvious importance, but only after we have answered a fundamental question: What, according to the earliest unambiguous Vedic tradition itself, were the thoughts or ideas provoked by the word *brahman* in the minds of those people who used it, i.e., the early composers and reciters of the Vedic verses? And, in order to answer this question, we have, again, to take the *Nighantu* as our starting point.

According to the *Nighantu*, *brahman* is a synonym either for food[638] or for wealth.[639] Commenting upon the first, the *Nirukta* added:

[635] *Ch. Up.* viii. 11 & 12. For a modern interpretation of the standpoint of the *Upanisads* on this question, see Bhattacaryya SP 11-30.

[636] ERE xii. 456ff: Radhakrishnan PU 52-95; An exhaustive bibliography of the modern interpretations of the *Upanisads* is to be found in Hume TPU 461-515.

[637] NB 1-9.

[638] ii. 7.

[639] ii. 10.

The word is derived from the root *vrih* (*vrimhi*), to increase, with the suffix *manin*. Therefore, *brahman* literally means that which is increased by all the animals, which does not decrease in spite of being always eaten, which by nature increases having the virtue of nourishing the whole world, or by which all beings increase. (See *Taittiriya Upanisad* (ii. 2), *jatani annena vardhante*, 'after being born increase by food.')

The *Taittiriya* passage, we shall see, points to the survival of the primitive proto-materalistic view of the early Vedic period, according to which food was the fundamental reality—an ancestral materialism from which the advanced thinkers of the *Upanisads* were trying consciously to be emancipated. In any case, this citation makes it absolutely clear that by *brahman* the author of the *Nirukta* meant food and nothing but food. And he claimed that this meaning of the word was illustrated by the following from the *Rig Veda*:

O Indra, being desired by the *dhi* (knowledge or action) of the *yajamanas,* the *vaghat* (a priest), who are with *soma,* come towards their foods (*brahmani*).[640]

As already indicated, the Vedic songs take us back to a period when human wealth was still conceived largely in terms of food. It is no wonder, therefore, that the *Nighantu* should have suggested that the same word *brahma* also meant wealth, *dhana.* Commenting upon this, the *Nirukta* emphasised again the concept of 'increase' inherent in it: *bhoganam brimhakam*, that which increased the nourishments. This meaning, according to the *Nirukta,* was illustrated by the following of the *Rig Veda*:

To you, Mitra and Varuna, be given offerings of food with praises (*namasa*) for protection; may our wealth (*brahma*) overpower in battle, may our rains from the sky be a good promoter.[641]

It is not easy to dismiss these evidences of the *Nirukta.* Thus if, from the point of view of the most authentic Vedic tradition the word *brahman* in these two *riks* stood for food and wealth (presumably in the form of food) respectively, we have hardly the justification to attribute to them any other primary meaning as occurring in the other contexts of the *Rig Veda,* unless, of course, there is some additional reason compelling us to do so. Yet, as is well known, Sayana almost persistently interpreted the word as *stotra* or song of praise. We do not know the tradition from which he drew. However, granting that it

640 i. 3. 5. 641 i. 153. 7.

was not in conflict with the ancient Vedic one, the only way in which we can perhaps accept his interpretation is from the point of view of our Chanting Dogs of the *Chandogya Upanisad*, for whom there was no song that was not for food. In other words, the meaning of *brahman* as *stotra*, if at all acceptable, can be taken only as a derivative meaning: *stotra* was the means of obtaining food, and therefore, it could sometimes be meant by the word for food.

But the implication 'to increase' which, as Yaska insisted, was inherent in the conception of *brahman*, hardly fits in with this sense of *stotra*. Besides, the desire was often for increase of *brahman* and it is simply a strain on our imagination to assume that the Vedic poets were deeply and fundamentally concerned with the desire for the increase of their *stotra*, while the overwhelming and obvious fact is that they were constantly obsessed with the desire for the increase of food and wealth. When, therefore, the context in which the word occurred in the *Rig Veda* suggests the desire for an increase of it, we can hardly have any justification to discard the tradition of the *Nighantu* and the *Nirukta* and take the word to mean *stotra*. And this is clearly the context of the word in a large number of cases:

'That Indra, being delighted together with the Angirases, with praises increased *brahma* while making the path (*brahma tutot gatum isnan*).'[642] '... Whose *brahma* increases as well as *soma* (*yasya brahma vardhanam yasya somah*).'[643] 'O Maruts, *give* to us that which is possessed with food, which increases food (*brahma citayat*) day by day; give us, the praisers, also food that we may in battles gain strength unattainable and unvanquished by the enemies and thus get the wisdom (*medha*).'[644] 'O Agni, increase the fuel, increase the offering, increase food (*brahma josi*), increase the welfare of the people with good praises...'[645] 'The Gritsamadas, O Asvins, performed *stomas* (panegyrics) which increase food (*brahma vardhanani*); people delighting in these went towards you...'[646] 'O Indra, come towards us being our wish-yielder, giving us heroic sons and delighting in food, along with the ancient ones (*sthavirevih*) killing the enemies; with all sorts of protections for us, increasing food (*brahma jusanah*), come towards us, O one with horses.'[647] And so on. In all these cases, Sayana interpre-

[642] ii. 20. 5.
[643] ii. 12. 14.
[644] ii. 34. 7.
[645] ii. 37. 6.
[646] ii. 39. 8.
[647] vii. 24. 4.

ted *brahma* as *stotra*. However, the *riks* themselves do not suggest any special reason for going against the authority of the *Nighantu* and the *Nirukta*.

It may be pointed out here that Sayana, in interpreting certain derivatives of the word *brahma*, found it impossible to contradict Yaska. *Brahma-codanim* was interpreted by him as *brahmanah annasya prerayitrim*, the sender of food or, more properly, the increaser of food: 'O Pusan, the resplendent, that inspirer of food whom you hold in your hand has attracted the hearts of all; do loosen your grip.'[648] He derived the name Brahmanaspati as the nourisher of the activity of food production.[649] In certain other cases, he wanted to add a ritual significance to this meaning of *brahma*. Thus, *brahma-karah*, the makers of *brahma*, was interpreted by him as *brahmanah annasya havih-laksanasya kartarah*,[650] the makers of food in the form of oblation. Could this addition of the ritual significance be due to some hesitation felt by the late commentator, who, saturated as he was with the idealistic ideas about the *brahman*, failed to take the word unceremoniously to mean such crude material realities as food or wealth?

With the early Vedic poets, however, it was different. They were themselves as much removed from the idealistic outlook of the *Upanisads* as the idealist philosophers of the *Upanisads* were from the archaic proto-materialism of their ancestors. This proto-materialism was evident by the overwhelming importance they attributed to food and material wealth. This explains why the word *brahman*, along with its derivatives, occurred no less than 232 times in the *Rig Veda* alone. In the *Atharva Veda*, too, we come across the word rather frequently. It remains for a systematic study of the prehistory of this concept to review all these references and find out if we are at all anywhere obliged to ignore the authority of Yaska and read in the concept any meaning other than food and wealth. For the purpose of our present argument, however, it is enough to point out that it is impossible to discover in this word, as occurring in the earlier portions of the *Vedas*, any significance even remotely resembling the ultimate reality as pure ego. Rather, if it is possible to read in the Vedic *brahma* any philosophical significance at all, this philosophy will have to be character-

648 vi. 53. 8.
649 On ii. 23. 1.
650 On vi. 29. 4.

ised as starkly materialistic, though inevitably a primitive and crude one. And this gives us some idea of the world-outlook upon the ruins of which the idealistic philosophy of the *Upanisads* eventually developed.

We may now conclude our argument with two more points. First, a strong hangover of this archaic world-outlook survived even in some of the passages of the *Upanisads*. Secondly, certain other passages of the *Upanisads* show that the development of the idealistic philosophy of this age was the result of a conscious effort at emancipation from this archaic world-outlook. We shall touch upon these points in bare outlines.

Yaska, we have already seen, gave us a clue to the first point. While explaining that *brahman* meant food, he cited the authority of the *Taittiriya Upanisad* in which survived the relic of this ancient view along with this modification. that by the time of the *Upanisads* the word had already come to acquire the significance of an all-comprehensive ultimate reality. We have thus in the *Taittiriya Upanisad* the view that food was the ultimate reality:

> From food, verily, are produced whatsoever creatures dwell on earth. Moreover, by food alone they live. And then also into it they pass at the end. Food, verily, is the eldest born of beings. Therefore is it called the healing herb of all. Verily, those who worship *brahman* as food obtain all food. For food, verily, is the eldest born of beings. Therefore is it called the healing herb for all. From food are beings born. When born they grow up by food. It is eaten and eats things. Therefore is it called food.[651]

This did not of course represent the position of the Upanisadic philosopher himself. The author of the text, immediately after this, passed on to describe how 'different from and within that which consists of the essence of food is the self that consists of life,' etc. Nevertheless, the passage has a good deal of interest for us. It indicates the kind of archaic proto-materialism which survived down up to the times of the *Upanisads* and from the influence of which the earliest idealists of our country were trying to emancipate themselves. This leads us to the second point, which is probably best illustrated by the well-known anecdote of Varuna and his son Bhrigu, told by the same *Upanisad*.[652]

Bhrigu, son of Varuna, approached his father and said, 'Declare, *brahma*, Sir.' The father gave the son the general

[651] ii. 2 (tr. Radhakrishnan PU).
[652] iii. 1-6.

formula as to the nature of the *brahma*: 'That, verily, whence beings here are born, that by which when born they live, that into which on deceasing they enter – that be desirous of understanding. That is *brahma*.' The son, on the basis of this, meditated on the nature of the *brahma*. The first fruit of his meditation was that *brahma* must have been *anna* or food. 'For, truly, indeed, beings here are born of food, when born they live by food, on deceasing they enter into food.' This did not satisfy the father who advised Bhrigu to meditate again. As a result of this second meditation, Bhrigu thought that *prana* or the vital breath was the ultimate reality or *brahma*. This, too, proved unsatisfactory and he was asked to meditate again. This time the son thought that *manas* or the mind was the ultimate reality. Even this was not a satisfactory view and so Bhrigu meditated again and thought that *vijnana* or intelligence was *brahma*. But Varuna asked him to meditate again and the son, at this final stage of meditation realised that *ananda* or bliss was the *brahman*.

How such a view, viz. *brahman* meant *ananda*, represented the standpoint of Vedantic idealism is a point discussed by both the traditional and modern interpreters of the *Upanisads*. What interests us in particular, however, is that to arrive at this position, the philosopher of the *Taittiriya Upanisad* had first of all to emancipate himself from the crude materialistic standpoint according to which food was the ultimate reality. That during the age of the *Upanisads* there really was prevalent such a crude materialistic view actively contested by the idealistic philosophers will be evident from the following passage of the *Brihat Aranyaka Upanisad*:

> '*Brahman* is food,' say some. This is not so, for, verily, food becomes putrid without life. 'Life is *brahman*,' say some. This is not so. For life dries up without food. But these two deities when they become united attain their highest state.
>
> So Pratrida said to his father: 'What good, indeed, can I do to one who knows this, or what evil, indeed, can I do to him?'
>
> The father said to him (with a gesture of) his hand, 'Oh no Pratrida, who attains the highest state (merely) by entering into unity with these two?'[653]

After this the father proceeded to expound the idealistic standpoint. Thus here also we find the conscious effort to be emancipated from the primitive proto-materialistic outlook. That these were not really isolated efforts of the Upanisadic philo-

[653] v. 12 (tr. Radhakrishnan PU).

sophers is further evidenced by the famous anecdote of Narada and Sanatkumara of the *Chandogya Upanisad.* The philosopher Sanatkumara led Narada to the view of the self as the ultimate reality or *brahman,* which he achieved by the method of progressively negating certain other views prevalent at the time and considered by Sanatkumara to be the expressions of lower wisdom. One of the views rejected ran as follows:

> Food, verily, is greater than strength. Therefore, if any one does not eat for ten days, even though he might live, yet, verily, he becomes a non-seer, a non-hearer, a non-thinker, a non-understander, a non-doer, a non-knower. But on the entrance of food (when he gets food), he becomes a seer, he becomes a hearer, he becomes a thinker, he becomes an understander; he becomes a doer, he becomes a knower. Meditate on food.
>
> He who meditates on food as *brahman,* he, verily, attains the worlds of food and drink. As far as food reaches, so far he who meditates on food as *brahman,* has unlimited freedom.
>
> 'Venerable Sir, is there anything greater than food?' (asked Narada).
>
> 'Yes, there is something greater than food' (said Sanatkumara).
>
> 'Do venerable Sir, tell me that.'[654]

These are only some of the examples of attempts to outgrow the ancient food-philosophy.[655] What interests us more is the tenacity of this ancient view, which alone can explain its survival in a more or less undistorted form in the occasional passages of the *Upanisads.* Thus the *Taittiriya Upanisad,* for all its efforts to be emancipated from this archaic view as evidenced by the story of Varuna and Bhrigu, almost abruptly declared:

> Do not speak ill of food. That shall be the rule. Life, verily, is food. The body is the eater of food. In life is the body established; life is established in the body. So is food established in food. He who knows that food is established in food, becomes established. He becomes an eater of food, possessing food. He becomes great in offspring and cattle and in the splendour of sacred wisdom; great in fame.
>
> Do not despise food. That shall be the rule. Water, verily, is food. Light is the eater of food. Light is established in water; water is established in light. Thus food is established in food.
>
> He who knows that food is established in food, becomes established. He becomes an eater of food, possessing food. He becomes

[654] vii. 9. 1-2 (tr. Radhakrishnan PU).

[655] Kosambi ISIH 123 describes the views expressed in *Tait. Up.* ii. 2. and *Maitri. Up.* vi. 11-2 as 'food-philosophy' and he explains it as 'excellent sublimated totemism.' I have, however, hesitated to accept this interpretation in view of the number of assertions it involves both with regard to the general question concerning the origin of totemism itself and the specific problem of the survival of this view in the *Upanisads.*

great in offspring and cattle, and in the splendour of sacred wisdom, great in fame.

Make for oneself much food. That shall be the rule....[656]

The naïveté of the passage is surely reminiscent of the early Vedic songs. And the survival of such primitive outlook in the *Upanisad* can be understood only if we remember that like the other *Upanisads* the *Taittiriya,* too, could not be the work of a single mind.[657] There are, naturally enough, different strata of thoughts recorded in the text. Some of these strata evidently represent the thoughts that were nearer those of the early Vedic poets while others represent the later idealistic outlook. It may, however, be pointed out that taken as a whole, probably the *Taittiriya Upanisad* retained the strongest memory of the early Vedic period. There are at least two distinct reasons for this assumption. First, it opened with the veneration expressed for the ancient Vedic gods — Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman, Indra, Brihaspati, Visnu — the memory of whom faded into insignificance in the other *Upanisads.* Secondly, the *Taittiriya* alone remembered the glory of the ancient *rita.*[658] It is no wonder, therefore, that this *Upanisad* should end with a peculiar mystical rapture over the ancient-food philosophy:

Oh, wonderful! Oh, wonderful! Oh, wonderful!
I am food! I am food! I am food!
I am a food-eater! I am a food-eater! I am a food-eater!
I am a verse-maker! I am a verse-maker! I am a verse-maker!
I am the first-born of the *rita*!
Earlier than the gods in the navel of immortality!
Who gives me away, he indeed has aided me!
I, who am food, eat the eater of food!
I have overcome the whole world.[659]

This takes us back to our Chanting Dogs of the *Chandogya Upanisad,* who sang only of food and of the eating of food. Again, this is clearly reminiscent of the Rig Vedic poet Agastya who went into ecstacies over the food-god Pitu. Admittedly, these are all very crude and primitive. What must, however, be clearly acknowledged is the fact that, with all its naïveté, it does form the subsoil of the idealistic outlook of the Upanisadic philosophers.

656 iii. 7-9 (tr. Radhakrishnan PU).

657 ERE xii. 541. Winternitz HIL i. 236.

658 Outside the *Taittiriya,* the word *rita* occurs only in *Katha* (iii. 1 and v. 2) and largely as an empty husk of its older significance.

659 iii. 10. 6 (tr. Hume TPU. We have, however, translated *sloka-krit* as verse-maker.)

That this passage should have survived in the *Upanisads*, to say the least, is a remarkable thing. There are no pretences here, either spiritual or idealistic. In the sense of being essentially pre-spiritualistic, it represents a stage of thought which we have called proto-materialistic. And yet the *Upanisads* are essentially idealistic treatises trying to prove, above everything else, the identity of the *brahman* and the *atman*. Such survivals of primitive proto-materialism in the *Upanisads*, therefore, is comparable to the survival of isolated primitive communities in the modern world – communities that 'reflect the spiritual conduct of our ancestors thousands of times remote.'

This takes us back to our main argument. The primitive proto-materialism which forms the subsoil of the Upanisadic idealism represented the ancestral convictions of the Upanisadic philosophers themselves who were yet to witness the degradation of *maya*, the ancient wisdom-action complex. But the latest stratum of the *Rig Veda* clearly foreshadowed it and the consequent exaltation of pure *jnana* as the secret monopoly of the freshly emerged leisured minority.

If this post-Vedic degradation of *maya* gives us the clue to the idealism of the *Upanisads*, its ancient glory, as recorded in the *Rig Veda*, provides the clue to the remarkable similarity between the Lokayata and the deeper substratum of the Vedic world-outlook. For with all the differences between the Lokayata and the Vedic tradition resulting from the circumstance of the former being rooted in the agricultural-matriarchal and the latter in the pastoral-patriarchal traditions respectively, the similarity – *as proto-materialism* – between the Lokayata and the subsoil of the Upanisadic idealism could only be the result of the fact that in the case of both, human consciousness had yet to dissociate itself from the process of manual or productive labour and thereby to evolve a world-outlook where the spirit held sway over matter.

With the emergence of the leisured class in the post-Vedic society, when manual labour began to be looked upon as slavish – the mark of the Sudra – the primitive proto-materialism of the Vedic tradition itself had already been undermined and the conditions created for the evolving of the idealistic outlook. However, the earliest philosophers upon whom fell the task of systematising it, had, first of all, to wage an ideologcial battle on two fronts as it were. They had to eliminate the hangover of their own ancestral convictions on the one hand, and simul-

taneously wage a war against the *pradhana-vada* which, as we have seen, represented the development of the Lokayata in the form of a self-conscious materialistic philosophy.

We cannot of course go into ecstasies over the primitive proto-materialism of either the Lokayata or the Vedic tradition. For it was crude, naive and primitive, and has little to compare with the self-conscious materialistic philosophy of original Sankhya, not to speak of the scientific materialism of today. Nevertheless, the recognition of this proto-materialism has its importance for the modern materialist and this importance can be compared to that of the recognition of primitive communism by the scientific socialist. He lays stress on it not because he dreams of returning to it; his purpose rather is to show that human relations based on private ownership and class-exploitation are not without a beginning and end: 'They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage.' Thus also is spiritualism and idealism, so often claimed as inherent in Indian thought: we will do without these in the furure as we did in the past.

Appendix

MATERIAL BASIS OF IDEALISM*

We do not expect the idealists to raise the question concerning the material basis of idealism. The question, by implying that there is such a possible basis, amounts to a surrender of the primacy of spirit to nature, the very foundation of idealism. In defence of their own position, therefore, the idealists have to reject the question as illegitimate.

With the materialists — particularly the Marxists — it must be different. The general structure of the idealistic outlook — whatever might have been the variations within it and however much it might have reacted back on the material conditions, — is of the nature of superstructure: it cannot be without a material basis. The circumstance that the materialists have not so far raised the question with sufficient seriousness does not imply that the question iteslf is unimportant from their point of view. Rather the importance of the question is not confined to the understanding of idealism alone. It may help us to understand, though negatively, something basic about the materialistic outlook itself, which is, on the Marxist understanding, the only consistent alternative to idealism.

We shall try to discuss here the position of Marxism with regard to this question. It will be a discussion of the *origin* of the idealistic outlook and not of its signficance or historical role.

Already in the *Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels observed: 'The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, namely the exploitation of one part of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common

* Extracts from the author's article published in the *New Age Monthly*, Aug., 1958.

forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms.'[1]

It is well known that when Marx and Engels drafted the *Manifesto*, 'the social organisation existing previous to recorded history was all but unknown.' Thanks mainly to the epoch-making work of Morgan, to our knowledge of social development was added the facts of primitive pre-historic society which had yet to witness class-differentiation and class-antagonism. This was the primitive communist society. We may thus identify three main stages in the development of human society: the primitive pre-class society, class society and the classless society of the future.

This point is important. It implies that the general ideas or the common forms within which, according to Marx and Engels, the social consciousness of the past ages had moved – because it was intimately related to class-antagonism and class-exploitation – are not to be sought either in the pre-class society of the past or in the classless society of the future.

But what did they mean by these general ideas or common forms of social consciousness characteristic of the class-society as a whole? Elsewhere, Marx called these the *mystical veil* of the life-process of class-society. 'The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.'[2] And Engels, borrowing the Hegelian terminology, characterised the same as *false consciousness*: 'Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces. Because it is a process of thought he derives its form as well its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material, which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, and does not investigate further for a more remote source independent of thought; indeed this is a matter of course to him, because, as all action is *mediated* by thought, it appears to him to be ultimately *based* upon thought.'[3]

[1] SW i. 129.
[2] C i. 80.
[3] SC 541.

One point is clear. The common form of the social consciousness of the entire period of class society is a false consciousness because it is imagined to be under the autonomy of pure thought, as made of mere thought-elements both in form and in content. We shall presently see the significance of this. For the moment there is another question. In spite of there being some general characteristic of class-society as a whole, its successive stages are marked by real differences as well. From the Marxist point of view, therefore, the general false consciousness of the class-society as a whole is expected to reveal different specific forms in the successive epochs of the class-society. How are we to understand these specific forms? George Thomson has suggested that the answer is to be found in what Marx and Engels, in the *German Ideology*, called the *illusion of each given epoch*.[4] 'The illusion of a given epoch is the false consciousness of that epoch. Thus, one of the achievements of socialist society is that it frees itself from false consciousness, which is a general characteristic of class-society, its particular form varying from one epoch to another ("the illusion of that epoch").'[5]

What concerns us, first of all, is a clue to this false consciousness. We have to seek for it in that which, according to Marxian understanding emerged at the superstructural level as a result of society splitting up into antagonistic classes and which, further, dominated human consciousness throughout class-society. Here is how Engels explained what it was: 'From generation to generation, labour itself became different, more perfect, more diversified. Agriculture was added to hunting and cattle-breeding, then spinning, weaving, metal-working, pottery and navigation. Along with trade and industry, there appeared finally art and science. From tribes there developed nations and states. Law and politics arose, and with them the fantastic reflection of human things in human mind: religion. In the face of all these creations, which appeared in the first place to be products of the mind, and which seemed to dominate human societies, the more modest productions of the working hand retreated into the background, the more so since the mind that planned the labour process already at a very early stage of development of society, was able to have this planned labour carried out by other hands than its own. All merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind, to

[4] GI 29.
[5] Thomson in *Communist Review*. Aug. 1952, 240-1.

the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explain their actions from their thoughts, instead of from their needs (which in any case are reflected, come to consciousness in the mind)—and so there arose in the course of time that idealistic outlook on the world which, especially since the downfall of the ancient world, has dominated men's minds. It still rules them....'[6]

If this is how Engels wanted us to look at the origin of the false consciousness characteristic of the class-society as a whole, we must infer that the idealistic outlook *is* the false consciousness that took different forms in the different epochs of class-society.

Engels also pointed out why the emergence of the idealistic outlook along with the emergence of the class-society cannot be looked at as an accidental coincidence. There was something inherent in the latter which accounted for the former. With society splitting up into classes, there took place the divorce of thought from action—of mental labour from manual labour—and also a sense of degradation attached to the latter: 'the growth of slavery,' as Engels said elsewhere, 'already began to brand working for a living as slavish and more ignominious than engaging in plunder.'[7] By contrast, all merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind because it was the mind that planned the labour process. That is, mental labour became the concern of the ruling class and thus, in the consciousness of the ruling class the verdict of the mind or thought or ideas acquired a stupendous significance. The result has been that the primacy of spirit or thought became the dominant characteristic of the world-outlook throughout class-society, for the main characteristic of the world-outlook of an age is determined by the dominant mode of the consciousness of the ruling class of the age. 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the idea of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.'[8]

If this explains why, throughout the history of class-society, the consciousness of the toiling class failed to become the domi-

[6] DN 238-9.
[7] OF 269.
[8] GI 37-8.

nant mode of consciousness, the explanation of the domination by the idealistic outlook of the consciousness of the ruling class throughout class-society is to be sought in the circumstance that in all the epochs of the class-society the ruling class remained the leisured class, that is the class that could withdraw itself from the direct responsibility of material labour, there being always the toiling class to shoulder it. Already in their first full statement of Marxism, Marx and Engels made this point quite clear: 'Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it is *really* conceiving something without conceiving something *real;* from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.'[9]

Thus, in order to proceed to the formation of the idealist outlook, consciousness has to emancipate itself from the world and the precondition of this is the emancipation of the thinking class from the obligation of manual labour. The reason for this is clear. The labour process, being essentially a transaction between nature and the material human body as a natural phenomenon, carries within itself a sense of objective coercion. That is, the reality of the material world, of nature, forces its stamp on the human consciousness so long as man remains engaged in the process of the manual operation. This is borne out by Marx's well-known analysis of the labour process. 'Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature. He opposes himself to nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants.'[10]

Marx went into much greater details in his analysis of the labour process and we can see from this how much this process owes to the acceptance of the material reality of the objective world or nature. All the factors involved in the labour process — the personal activity of the man, the subject of the work (which, when filtered through previous labour, is called the raw material), and the instruments of labour — all these are the

[9] *Ib.* 19-20. [10] C i. 177.

product of the material world or nature. 'The soil in the virgin state in which it supplies man with necessaries or the means of subsistence ready to hand, exists independently of him, and is the universal subject of human labour. All those things which labour merely separates from immediate connection with their environment, are subjects of labour spontaneously provided by nature.... An instrument of labour is a thing, or a complex of things, which the labourer interposes between himself and the subject of his labour, and which serves as the conductor of his activity. He makes use of the mechanical, physical, and chemical properties of some substances in order to make other substances subservient to his aims.... Thus nature becomes one of the organs of his activity, one that he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible. As the earth is his original larder, so too it is his original tool house.'[11]

If the labour process is so much under obligation to nature or the objective world, how can human consciousness, without emancipating itself from its verdict, move towards an idealistic outlook, the primary prerequisite of which is the denial of the self-sufficient or independent existence of nature? But there are more points involved in the Marxist understanding of the idealistic outlook. For, idealism is not merely the negative doctrine of the denial of nature; it is the *positive theory of spirit or consciousness being the ultimate reality*, of thoughts and ideas dictating terms to reality. Secondly, on the Marxist understanding, the idealist outlook was the result of a process of *social evolution*, the characteristic of which is not the cessation of the role of manual labour but rather the receding of it to the background of social reality – to such a position of degradation and contempt as hardly to have any longer a claim to contribute to the predominant world-outlook.

For an understanding of these two points we have to analyse a further characteristic of the labour-process to which Marx drew our attention: 'We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its

[11] *Ib.* i. 178-9.

commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi,* and to which he must subordinate his will.'[12]

In the beginning, thus, there is an idea. Of course, this idea is not pure subjectivism in any abstract sense because it is itself the product of the material conditions: it arises from the concrete material needs felt by the living human individuals in their relation to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the idea is not the same as the material condition originating it. The two are qualitatively distinct. That is, as idea it acquires a kind of real subjectivity which it would be vulgar materialism to overlook. And the decisive characteristic of human labour is that such an idea exists at the beginning of the labour-process and initiates it. At the end, again, there is only the realisation of this idea in the objective world – the objective world satisfying the idea that initiates the labour-process. And everything in human labour that carries the sense of the objective coercion, i.e., the process of the manual operation, strictly speaking, occurs in between these two extremes. However, when the ultimate result is reached, the stamp of the intermediate steps involved is no longer apparent. As Marx said, 'The process disappears in the product, the latter is a use-value, nature's material adapted by a change of form to the wants of man. Labour has incorporated itself with its subject: the former is materialised, the latter transformed.'[13]

It is not difficult to see what happens when the importance of the entire intermediate process involving the material transaction between man and nature snaps off from human consciousness, i.e., the ruling-class consciousness. There remains only the idea at the beginning and at the end only the realisation or the satisfaction of the idea in the objective world – an appearance of the subordination of nature to the demands of the spirit or consciousness. Human ideas do appear to dictate terms to the world and consciousness does assume the semblance of the ultimate reality. And here we have the essence of the idealistic outlook.

So long as it is the question of the individual labourer, there is obviously little possibility of the development of such an outlook. Engaged as he is in the labour process itself, the stamp of the immediate reality of the objective world – the

[12] *Ib.* i. 178. [13] *Ib.* i. 180.

objective world as the subject of his labour, the toolhouse of his instruments and the basis of his sheer physical existence — cannot be washed away from his personal consciousness. So long, again, as it was the collective life of the pre-class society, there could be no question of anybody having such an outlook, for there could be no existence in it without a share in the labour of the community as a whole. However, while explaining the sources of the idealistic outlook Marx and Engels were not speaking of either of these two standpoints. They were discussing specifically the breakdown of society into antagonistic classes and the effect of this on the world-outlook of the leisured class.

The crucial point is that with the emergence of class-differences, 'the plan, the purpose, the piece of imagination' sought to be realised in the material world through the labour-process gets detached from the aspect of the manual operation proper because the former becomes the concern only of the ruling class while the latter that of the toiling class. The idea given shape to by the labourers is no longer their own; those whose idea is realised through the labour-process, again, have no share in the labour-process itself. The beginnings of this are to be traced when the division between the actual producers and the organisers of production took place and it assumed a well-defined form when these organisers of production — originally only the custodians of the means of production — converted themselves into the owners thereof. At this stage society finally split up into the ruling class and the toiling class.

It is only from the standpoint of the former that we may understand the real force of the idealistic argument. The Pharaohs thought, let there be the pyramids and the pyramids were there. Thought did indeed dictate terms to reality. And since it was the thought of that class in whose consciousness the manual operation of the million slaves had no longer any validity, the intermediate steps involved between the demand of thought and the satisfaction of it in reality lost all claim to contribute to the general world-outlook. The result was a delusion of the omnipotence of thought and it is here that we find the real source of the idealistic argument — the false consciousness of class-society as a whole.

It naturally remained for materialism to be the philosophy of revolution — the materialism of the British revolution and the materialism of the French revolution. For these were the pro-

ducts of situations in which the toiling class did move to the forefront of the social reality. Observed Engels: 'And although, on the whole, the bourgeoisie in its struggle with the nobility could claim to represent at the same time the interests of the different labouring classes of that period, yet in every great bourgeois movement there were independent outbursts of that class which was the more or less developed forerunner of the modern proletariat.... Alongside of these revolutionary armed uprisings of a class which was as yet immature, corresponding theoretical manifestations made their appearance.'[14]

We have here the clue to the materialistic philosophies of those periods. At the same time, corresponding to the limitations of those revolutions, the materialist philosophies, too, had their limitations. Rather than establishing the social superiority of the toiling class, these revolutions simply replaced one exploiting class by another. And these materialist philosophies, too, already pregnant with their opposites, had eventually to culminate in disguised or overt idealism.

It is interesting to observe how the false consciousness of class-society has, in the modern period, taken the form of the specific illusion of the epoch.

The social root of the idealistic outlook – the separation of thinking from the manual operation – started quite early in the history of social development. Further advance in the productive technique went on nourishing it until in the modern period the whole thing took the form of what Marx called 'industrial pathology.' Referring to the division of labour in modern manufacture, Marx observed: 'It converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts.... Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation.'[15] And again, 'The knowledge, the judgment, and the will, which, though in ever so small a degree, are practised by the independent peasant or handicraftsman...: these faculties are now required only for the workshop as a whole. Intelligence in production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others. What is lost by the detail labourers, is concentrated in the capital that employs them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufactures, that the labourer is brought face to face with the intellectual potencies

[14] Marx & Engels SW i. 152. [15] C i. 360.

of the material process of production, as the property of another, and as a ruling power.'[16]

Marx quoted Adam Smith: 'The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations has no occasion to exert his understanding.... The uniformity of his stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of his mind.... But in every improved and civilised society, this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall.'[17]

Commented Marx: 'For preventing the complete deterioration of the great mass of the people by division of labour, A. Smith recommends education of the people by the state, but prudently, and in homœpathic doses. G. Garnier, his French translator and commentator, who, under the first French empire, quite naturally developed into a senator, quite as naturally opposes him on this point. Education of the masses, he urges, violates the first law of the division of labour, and with at "our whole social system would be proscribed." "Like all other divisions of labour," he says, "that between hand labour and head labour is more pronounced and decided in proportion as society (he rightly uses this word for capital, landed property and their state) becomes richer. This division of labour, like every other, is an effect of past, and a cause of future progress....ought the government then to work in opposition to this division of labour, and to hinder its natural course? Ought it to expend a part of the public money in the attempt to confound and blend together two classes of labour, which are striving after division and separation?" '[18]

Ferguson, added Marx in his foot-note, had already said, 'And thinking itself, in this age of separations, may become a peculiar craft.'[19] It is no wonder, then, that the philosopher of the age should come out with the most outspoken manifesto of pure thought – the sharp declaration that of all his activities he could feel most indubitably certain only of pure thinking. As is well known, Descartes made the bare *cogito* – the bare 'I think' – the starting point of his philosophy: 'Can I affirm that I possess any one of all those attributes of which I have lately spoken as belonging to the nature of body? After attentively considering them in my own mind, I find none of them

[16] *Ib*. i. 361.
[17] *Ib*. i. 362.
[18] *Ib*. i. 362-3.
[19] *Ib*. i. 362 n.

that can properly be said to belong to myself. To recount them were idle and tedious. Let us pass, then, to the attributes of the soul.... Thinking is another attribute of the soul; and here I discover what properly belongs to myself. This alone is inseparable from me. I am – I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be.'[20]

Descartes, they say, was the father of modern philosophy. He was the first to give the most momentous expression to the illusion of the modern epoch. Subsequent development of modern European philosophy has largely been the development of this Cartesian principle of the bare *cogito* as the most indubitable starting point of philosophy. It remained for Hegel and his followers to carry this principle to its furthermost logical limits: 'Thus Hegel restores to thought its own right. Thought is not one existential form of the absolute beside others; it is the absolute itself in its concrete unity of self; it is the idea come back to itself – the idea that knows itself to be the truth of nature and the power in it.'[21]

However, if this modern manufacturing period created conditions for the sharpest expression of the idealistic outlook, it also enhanced the process leading to the final refutation of it. For the same division of labour in the modern manufacturing period has developed the productive power to such an enormous extent and given it such a highly socialised form that it will ultimately rebel against the production relations and threaten the very structure of class-divided society.

The earlier materialists tried to refute and reject the idealistic outlook. Where they failed, however, was to see its social roots. Diderot, for example, felt frankly exasperated: 'Those philosophers are called *idealists* who, being conscious only of their existence and of the sensations which succeed each other within themselves, do not admit anything else. An extravagant system which, to my thinking, only the blind could have originated; a system which, to the shame of human intelligence and philosophy, is the most difficult to combat, although the most absurd of all.'[22] And Lenin commented that Diderot came very close to the standpoint of contemporary materialism (Marxism),

[20] Descartes *Meditations* (Everyman) 87-8.
[21] Schwegler *History of Philosophy* 316.
[22] Quoted by Lenin MEC 27.

namely 'that arguments and syllogisms alone do not suffice to refute idealism.'[23]

The point is, it is impossible to refute idealism on the strength of mere philosophical arguments, however clever. Such an effort is after all an appeal to the judgment of pure thought — the acceptance of the detached consciousness as having the highest verdict on the nature of reality — and this is the basic claim of idealism itself. As is argued by the idealists, it is impossible to prove the primacy of matter because the very organ of such a proof would be thought itself and as such would imply the primacy of the spirit. However, the premise of the detached thought, upon which such arguments rest, is itself the product of the social conditions under which thought is actually detached from action and exalted over it.

If the idealistic outlook is the result of the separation of thought from action, it can be refuted not by appealing to one fragment of these separated elements but only by restoring the lost union of these two, which, in its turn, cannot be done without changing the very structure of the class-society. In other words, the false consciousness of class-society can be finally eliminated only by overthrowing the class-structure of society itself. While explaining their own materialistic conception of history, Marx and Engels observed, 'It has not, like the idealistic view of history, in every period to look for a category, but remains constantly on the real ground of history; it does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice; and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that *all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism,* by resolution into "self-consciousness" or transformation into "apparitions," "spectres," "fancies," etc., *but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug;* that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory.'[24] It is from this point of view alone that we can understand the philosophical significance of revolutionary practice emphasised by Marx in his oft-quoted eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways, the point however is to *change* it.'[25]

[23] *Ib.*
[24] GI 27. Italics added.
[25] Marx & Engels SW i. 354.

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1. Italics are invariably used to indicate books other than those in the English language. Among these, books in the Bengali language are indicated by '(B)' following the abbreviation in italics. Section IV of this Bibliography contains a list of the Sanskrit and Pali texts referred in abbreviations in the foot-notes and Section V gives a separate list of the Bengali books referred to.

2. When the abbreviation in the foot-note does not indicate any separate monograph by any individual author, the initials refer to the author's contribution either to some general reference work (Section II of the Bibliography) or to some periodical (Section III of the Bibliography).

3. The Bibliography is meant only to be a guide to the notes; other works referred to are mentioned in full in the body of the book and the names of these occur in italics in the General Index.

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SECTION II: GENERAL REFERENCE WORKS

A	*The Adivasis*. Delhi, 1955.
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DPPN	*Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*. G. P. Malalasekera. London, 1937-38.
EB	*Encyclopædia Britannica*. (14th. ed.), 1939.
ERE	*Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*. (ed.) J. Hastings. Edinburgh, 1908-18.
HOS	*Harvard Oriental Series*.
HPEW	*History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*. (ed.) S. Radhakrishnan. London, 1952.
IGI	*Imperial Gazetteer of India*. (ed.) W. W. Hunter. London, 1881. Revised ed., Oxford, 1907-9.
NINQ	*North Indian Notes and Queries*. Allahabad, 1891-95.
PTS	(Pali Text Society Dictionary) *Pali-English Dictionary* by T. W. Rhys-Davids and W. Stede. Surrey, 1925.
S	*Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by A. A. Macdonell. London, 1893.
SBE	*Sacred Books of the East*. (ed.) F. Max-Muller.
SD	*Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by H. H. Wilson. Calcutta, 1819.
SED	*Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by M. Monier-Williams. Oxford, 1899.

SPD — *St. Petersburg Dictionary* by R. Roth and O. Bohtlingk. St. Petersburg, 1855-84.
VA — *Vedic Age.* (ed.) R. C. Majumdar. London, 1951.
VK(B) — *Viswa Kosa.* Bengali Encyclopædia. (ed.) N. N. Bose. Calcutta.

SECTION III: PERIODICALS

BMFAB — *Bulletin of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.*
BV — *Bharatiya Vidya.*
CR — *Calcutta Review.*
F — *Folklore.*
IA — *Indian Antiquary.*
IHQ — *Indian Historical Quarterly.*
JAOS — *Journal of the American Oriental Society.*
JAnSB — *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay.*
JASB — *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.*
JBBRAS — *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.*
JBORS — *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.*
JGRS — *Journal of the Gujarat Research Society.*
JLD — *Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University.*
JRAI — *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.*
JRAS — *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.*
MASI — *Memoirs of the Archæological Survey of India.*
MI — *Man in India.*
NAM — *New Age Monthly.*
PAOS — *Proceedings of the American Oriental Society.*
PIPC — *Proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress.*
VD(B) — *Vanga-Darsana.*

SECTION IV: SANSKRIT AND PALI TEXTS

A — *Arthasastra.*
AB — *Aitareya Brahmana.*
AV — *Atharva Veda.*
Br S — *Brihat Samhita.*
Br Su — *Brahma Sutra.*
Br Up — *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad.*
Ch Up — *Chandogya Upanisad.*
KSS — *Katyayana Srauta Sutra.*

M	*Mahabharata.*
P	*Prabodhacandrodaya.*
PS	*Panini Sutra.*
RV	*Rig Veda.*
SDS	*Sarva Darsana Samgraha.*
SK	*Sankhya Karika.*
Sat DS	*Sat Darsana Samuccaya.*
SV	*Sumangala Vilasini.*
TRD	*Tarka Rahasya Dipika.*
VS	*Vajasaneyi Samhita.*

SECTION V: BENGALI AND HINDI BOOKS

BD(B)	*Bauddha Dharma* by H. P. Sastri.
BDS(B)	*Bharat Darsana Sara* by U. C. Bhattacharya.
BR(B)	*Bankim Racanavali* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya.
BS(B)	*Bharater Samskriti* by K. Sen.
BUS(B)	*Bharatvarsiya Upasaka Sampradaya* by A. K. Dutta.
BV(B)	*Banglar Vrata* by A. Tagore.
DD (H)	*Darsana Digdarsana* by Rahul Sankrityayana.
JB(B)	*Jati Bheda* by K. Sen.
KKV(B)	*Kriya Kanda Varidhi.*
PBSI(B)	*Prachin Bharatiya Sabhyatar Itihas* by P. C. Ghose.
RV(B)	*Rig Veda* by D. Lahiri.
SB(B)	*Sariraka Bhasya* by K. Vedantavagish.
SD(B)	*Sankhya Darsana* by K. Vedantavagish.
SS(B)	*Sahajiya Sahitya* by M. M. Bose.
SS(B)	*Siksha O Sabhyata* by A. C. Gupta.
TP(B)	*Tantra Paricaya* by S. Bhattacharya.
R(B)	*Racanavali* by P. Bandopadhyaya.
VD(B)	*Vanga Darsana* (ed.) by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya.
VK(B)	*Viswa Kosa* (ed.) by N. N. Bose.

GENERAL INDEX

CORRIGENDA

P. 37, lines 17, 19, 22, 29: read 'Medhatithi' for 'Medhatiti'.

P. 38, line 5: read 'wordly' for 'world-'.

P. 38, line 15: insert '(2)' before 'expert' etc.

P. 58: foot-note 165 should read as 'See Childe NLMAE 183-4'.

P. 111, line 16: read 'later' for 'latest'.

Pp. 111-2: read 'Maruts' for 'Marutas'.

P. 129, line 25: insert 'took it as' after 'sixth century A.D.'

P. 132, line 21: read '*vighna*' for '*cighna*'.

P. 166, last line: read '*annam na bhunjate*' for '*annam bhunjate*'.

P. 204, line 8: read 'and traced to totemistic animals' for 'and to totemistic animals'.

P. 227, line 22: delete 'not' after 'ideology'.

P. 293, line 23: read '(Fig. 2)' for '(Fig. 3)'.

P. 322: transpose captions of Figs. 11 & 13.

P. 366, line 32: read 'Vedanta school' for 'Nyaya school'.